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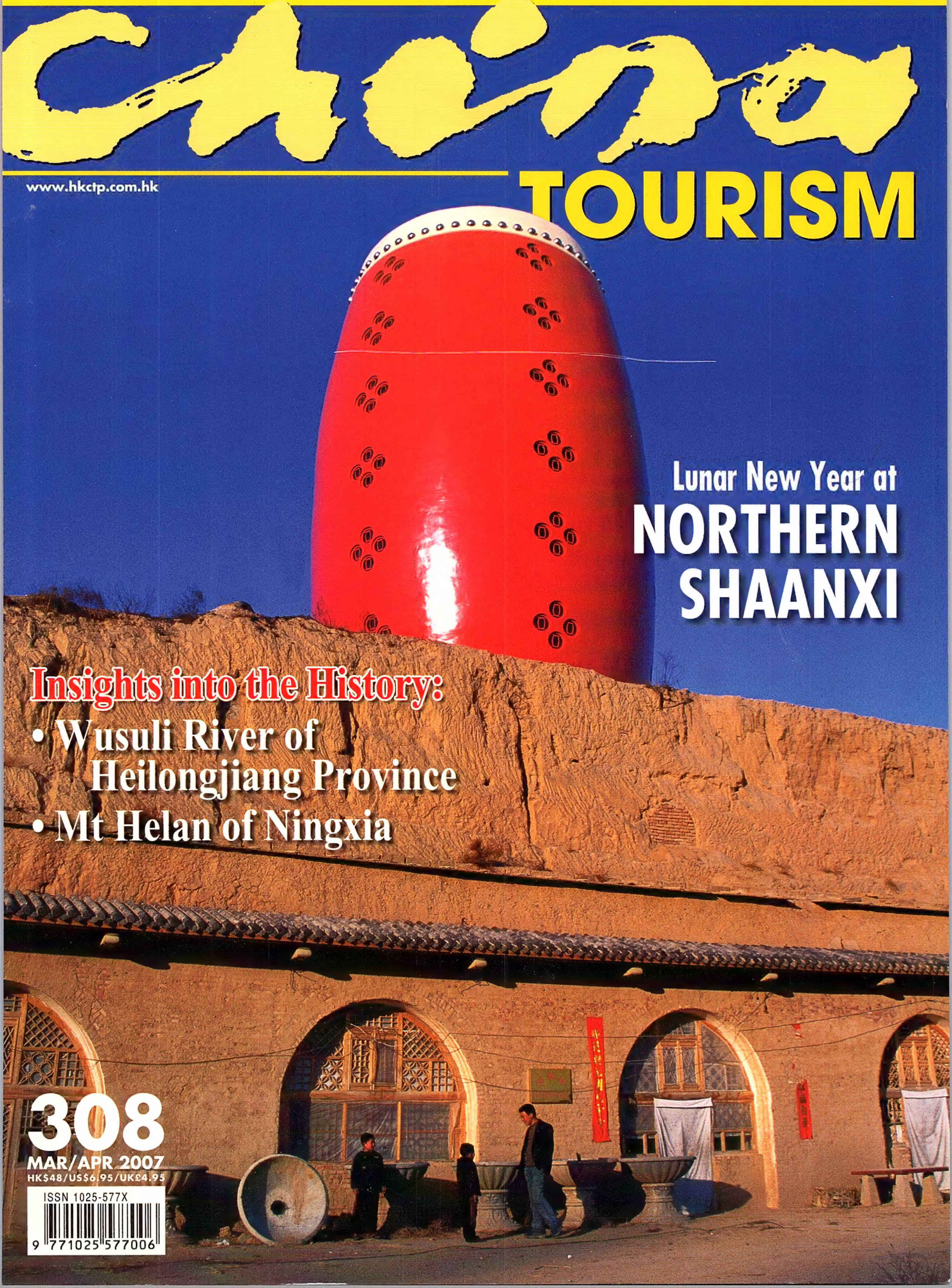

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Wusuli — China's Easternmost River

Photos & Article • Xie Guanghui Text Edition • Beth McNeilly

In the far east of China's Northeast region runs a river called Wusuli, which runs south to north through Mishan, Hulin, Raohe and Fuyuan before joining the Heilongjiang River in northeast Fuyuan. In this area, you are to get an insight of the contemporary Chinese history...

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Helan Mountains — Nature's Great Wall

Photos & Article • Shi Baoxiu Text Edition • Beth McNeilly

Nature is the very source essence of all life. The joint forces of the Helan Mountains and the Yellow River created the riches of Yinchuan, and the Yinchuan people are blessed with affluence and leisure. The Helan Mountains deserve the respect and admiration of us all.

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Ultimate Sea Journey

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Panyu — Food Glorious Food, Morning to Midnight

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Were you to spend a day in Panyu, a city nearby Guangzhou, you could feast from morn to night — on everything from the country-style cooking of ancestral hall banquest to a mouth-watering plethora of sweets and pastries.

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The Smile of the Yungang Buddha Photos & Article • Anita Yeung

It was not until the 2nd century that the first artistic image of the Buddha appeared in Gandhara in northwest India, and later similar images were introduced to China. But the author was surprised to find the Yungang Grottoes are located 16 km from Datong, one of the most polluted cities in China.

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Xinchang was once as famous as Suzhou or Zhujiajiao, two celebrated watertowns in Southeast China. No wonder it was selected by Ang Lee as a venue for filming the director's new movie *Se Jie*.

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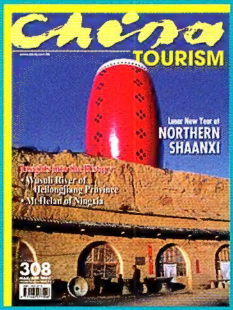

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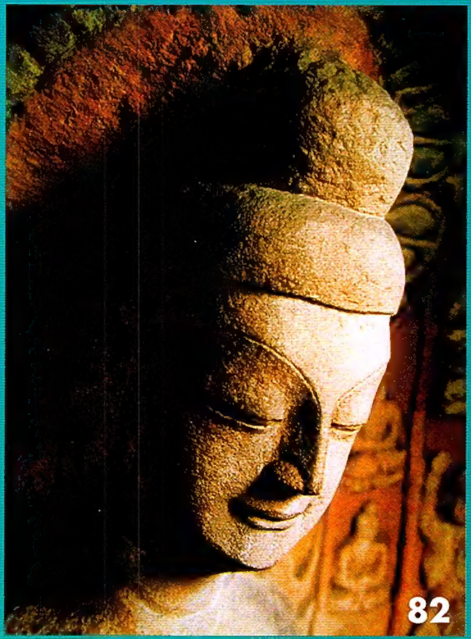

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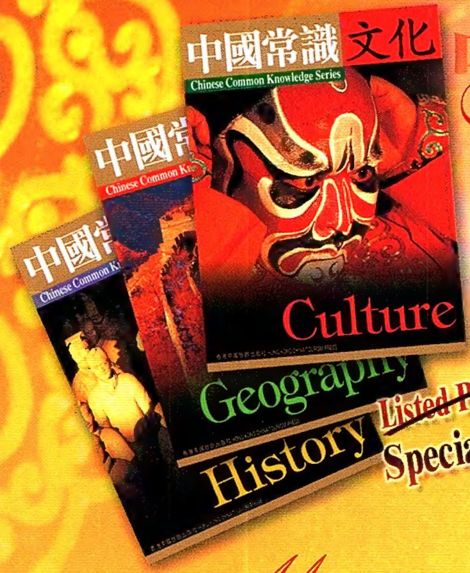

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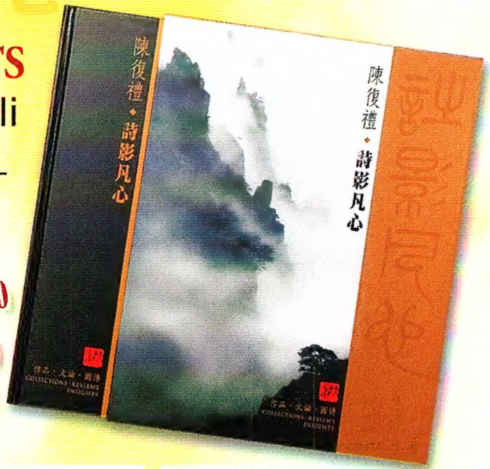

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Apr 22 ~ 27 **Xi'an**

International Taoism Forum

Co-sponsored by the China Religious Culture Communication Association and the Taoist Association of China, the forum is expected to attract more than 300 delegates from 19 countries around the world. The purpose is to carry forward China's splendid culture and Taoism, which has many positive thoughts that can help people solve conflicts.

Feb 22 ~ Mar 1 **Lhasa**

Monlam Prayer Festival

It can also be called Great Prayer Festival, in which from New Year's day until the end of 'Monlam', people continue to eat, drink and make merry. In Lhasa, an offering carefully crafted from butter and over 10-metre high was put in the Jokhang Temple, where most of the monks from the monasteries around Lhasa would gather.

Apr 6 ~ 12 **Yunnan**

Yunnan Multi Culture Visual Festival

A bi-annual event promoting documentary film production and distribution in and around Yunnan. Its long term aims are to integrate visual media and participatory visual education into local curricula. First held in 2003, the most recent event took place in March 2005. Website: www.yunfest.org/default-en.htm

Mar **Zhuhai**

1st Yacht Exposition

The first yacht exposition will further boost the industry, a variety of boats and an industry policy forum is expected to be held during the exposition. More than 300 yacht makers and experts from China and abroad will gather in the coastal city of Zhuhai, Guangdong Province, to discuss the industry's management and regulations. Recently, there are 60 yacht clubs in the mainland.

2007

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Apr 28 ~ May 5 **Hangzhou**

Int'l Cartoon & Animation Festival

The week-long festival will feature an international cartoon and animation industry exposition, a forum on the cartoon and animation industry and a cartoon character parade, with the slogan 'Colourful Cartoon, Harmonious Life'. World famous cartoon producers from France, Japan, the United States, Hong Kong and Croatia are invited to join.

Mar 16 ~ 25 **Victoria Park**

Hong Kong Flower Festival 2007

One of the largest event opened in the town in spring, the festival features 'Geranium' as its theme flower and the theme 'Spring Blossoms for Celebration'. There will also be commercial stalls, competitions on student drawing, photography, exhibitions, music and cultural performances, floral art demonstrations, plant maintenance workshops, green stalls, guided visits, etc that will add the enjoyment of tourists.

Feb ~ Mar **Hainan**

Junpo Festival for Hainan People

It is the biggest festival of local Han people after Chinese New Year to worship the national heroine called Madam Xian (513—603), who was a politician and militarist and has been honoured by the folks of Hainan for 1,300 years. In this four-day festival, Hainan people dress up in military uniform and perform lion dances and singing, adding the kowtow to the statues of Madam Xian and worshipping in temples.

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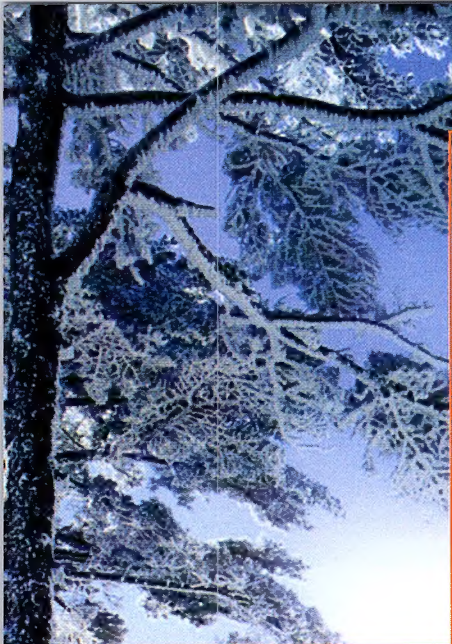
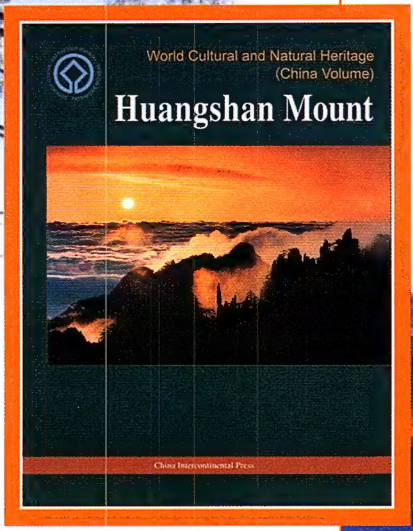


Mt. Huangshan, situated in the south of Anhui Province, is one of the most famous scenic areas in China. Being put into the World Heritage List, it is also granted with two laurels of cultural heritage and natural heritage by the UNESCO's World Heritage Commission.

The landscape of the mountain is a typical granite hoodoo landform shaped during the long geological periods by several tectonic movements in the crust. Mt. Huangshan has long been famous for its strange-looking pine trees, grotesque rocks, sea of clouds and hot springs.

All over one thousand metres above sea level, there are 77 peaks in the scenic area of almost two hundred square kilometres. Granite rock forests and rock columns together with massive rocks scatter everywhere. Moreover, Mt. Huangshan is a diverse ecosystem with a treasure of wildlife. There are approximately 1450 species of plants, 300 species of vertebrates and 170 species of birds.

Combined unique scenery and magnificent sea of clouds, the beauty of Mt. Huangshan has continued to fascinate endless visitors. Catch a glimpse of its glory in this "Huangshan Mount" pictorial that is filled with breath-taking images taken by our team of photographers!



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Quest for More

Chinese New Year has come and gone but the adventurous team at China Tourism has not slowed down. In this issue we introduce two lesser-known areas – the Wusuli River in easternmost Heilongjiang Province and the Helan Mountains crouching on the western border of the Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region. While neither may be a well-established scenic spot with stellar accommodation or the usual tourist entertainments, both have played important roles throughout Chinese history.

The reporters travelling to both destinations experienced hard times en route: whether attempting to take photos in bitterly cold, inclement weather or trekking over a series of mountain passes rarely visited by tourists, or anyone else, in intense heat and rough conditions. Yet, both declared their quests worthwhile for the rich historical knowledge they gained.

Meanwhile, we bring you exotic New Year experiences from Shaanxi Province and Lhasa. Enjoy the jubilant *yangge* and waist-drum dances, stay in the cave dwellings, or greet Tibetans in their traditional way. If you fancy a northern holiday, our Photography section has hints and tips for taking pictures in the snow.

Are your ready? Let's head for those roads less travelled!

(by Xie Guanghui)

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STAY YOUR OWN WAY

Hoh Xil Threatened by Over-grazing

Chinese scientists warned recently that Hoh Xil, China's highest altitude nature reserve located in Qinghai, is likely to be overrun by livestock in 10 years. In 2005 and 2006, the number of livestock was still increasing rapidly. More than half of the Hoh Xil Nature Reserve —27,000 sq km — has become pasture.

Early reports said hundreds of herdsmen with more than 40,000 sheep and 7,200 cattle had settled in the reserve. Some herdsmen even settled near the edge of the glacier from which China's longest river, Yangtze River, originates. The grazing activities had driven wild animals from their traditional habitats and threatened their survival. With the decrease of wild animals, mice reproduced rapidly, which seriously damaged the region's vegetation and soil.

More Confucius Institutes to Be Set in Asia

China will set up three Confucius Institutes in central and west Asia this year to satisfy the growing demand for Mandarin, China's official language. Starting 1 March, there will be recruitment of volunteer teachers in Xinjiang and they will be trained in teaching Chinese language.

Preparations for the three institutes in Russia, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan are well underway. The Education Department, which was authorized to set up Confucius institutes in neighbouring countries, will cooperate with the education authorities of the three countries to complete the project. Confucius institutes are non-profit schools specializing in Chinese language education and cultural communication. They have become an important means of expanding Chinese teaching abroad and stepping up understanding between China and rest of the world. The world's first Confucius Institute opened in Seoul in 2004.

Tibet to Start Regional Railway Grid Layout

Tibet is to start research on regional railway grid layout and local equipped projects construction for the coming Lhasa-Xigazê section of the Qinghai-Tibet Railway to make the local public equipped construction projects and railway body project construction design, building and operation at the same time.

The preparation for construction of the Lhasa-Xigazê section, an extending line of the Qinghai-Tibet Railway, will be speeded up and. Furthermore, preparation for the construction of Lhasa-Nyingchi branch railway was also in great demand.

Ningxia to Open Direct Flight for Hajj

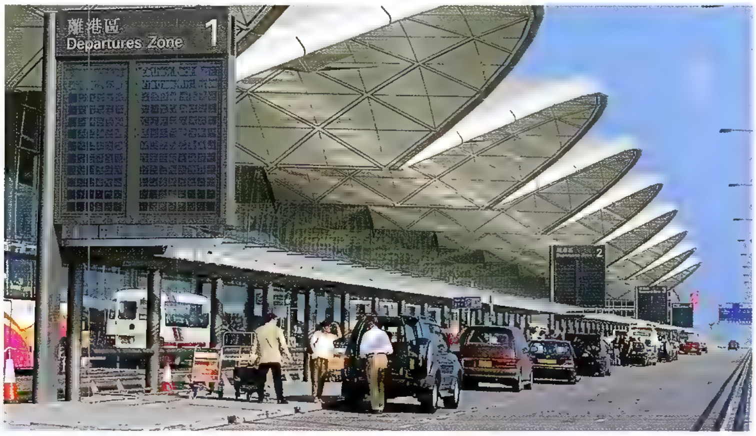
Muslims from Northwest China's Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region will find it easier to fulfill their pilgrimages to Medina, Saudi Arabia, as a new direct flight will be available to take them to the sacred place in 2007.

Yinchuan, capital of Ningxia, will become the fifth departure port for non-stop charter flights to Saudi Arabia, according to Yang Zhibo, vice chairman of the Islamic Association of China (IAC). The opening of a direct route will save time and energy. The other four departure ports are Beijing, Urümqi in Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region, Lanzhou in Gansu Province and Kunming in Yunnan Province. Xinjiang, Ningxia and Gansu are home to 16 million Muslims.

Ngong Ping 360 to Celebrate the CNY

The Year of the Pig is being welcomed in spectacular style at Ngong Ping 360, Hong Kong's unique world-class tourism attraction with an array of colourful decorations and activities. From 26 January to 4 March (Chinese Valentine's Day), guests are invited to celebrate Chinese New Year and its traditional festivities at Ngong Ping 360 and 'Embrace the Year of the Pig' in a unique traditional Chinese style.

In Ngong Ping Village, guests can enjoy a selection of entertainment, such as daring Chinese acrobats and traditional Chinese dances. Guests will also be able to marvel at the traditional Chinese folk arts and handicrafts by watching Chinese masters demonstrating rose-knitting



Hong Kong Airport to Open Precious Metals Depository

A precious metals depository at Hong Kong International Airport (HKIA) will be opened by the end of 2007. The move is aimed at enhancing Hong Kong's role as a financial and logistics centre and meeting growing regional demand for gold.

The precious metals depository will provide a central, secure storage facility for traders, institutional investors, gold producers and refineries, and serve as a physical settlement platform for trades made on the Chinese Gold and Silver Exchange Society and other Asian markets. The depository will also minimize risk, and reduce settlement time, transportation and insurance costs for the industry.

National Museum Closes for Three Years

The National Museum of China, the grand building on the east side of Tian'anmen Square in downtown Beijing, closed in January for a three-year overhaul that will make it the world's largest arts and history museum. The museum's floor space will be expanded from the current 65,000 square metres to 192,000 square. When it re-opens, its displays, security measures, and services will all be equal to a world-class museum.The National Museum, which was formerly the Museum of the Chinese Revolution was built in 1959. It houses hundreds of thousands of cultural relics from different periods of China's 5,000-year history. It is home to millions of scrolls and other cultural relics.

Guangdong Works to Revitalize Forest

The 300-million-yuan restoration work, which starts in this June, will cover the coastal area between the Mangrove Ecological Park and Xinzhou River mouth. In 2010, tourists will be able to explore more of the city's mangrove forest.

Fengtang River which runs through the forest will be cleaned up and more mangrove trees will be planted in the area. A wooden pathway will be built allowing tourists to walk deep into the forest, leading to a newly built 'nest-shaped' museum which will screen science films and house mangrove exhibitions. But in order to avoid polluting the area, only about 160 tourists will be allowed to enter every day.

Ocean Park Celebrates Its 30th Anniversary

To celebrate the park's 30th anniversary, from now until 10 Jan, 2008, simply present one's HK identity card or HK Birth Certificate, the person could enjoy free day time admission. Also, from 20 Jan to 4 March, the park will be hosting a parade of retrospective music and dance performance, as well as cuisine carnival. A permanent hot balloon show has also opened recently, which to-be-couples can take the balloon up to 100 metres to witness their endless love. Inquiry: (852) 2873 8560

Renovation of Xigazê Castle to Finish

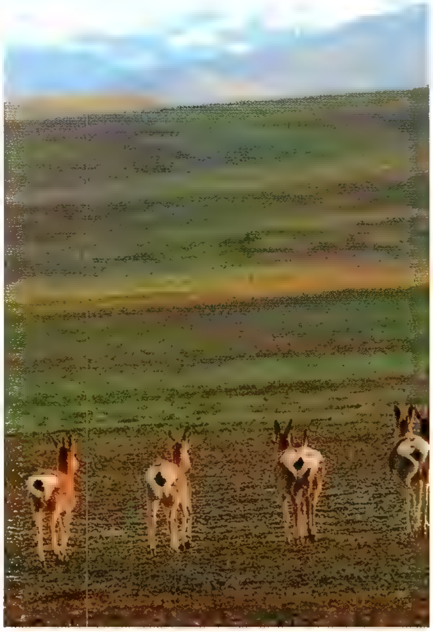
Renovation of the Sangzhu Zizong Castle, an ancient site with over 600 years history in Xigazê in Tibet is under going, and will be finished in May 2008. The Sangzhu Zizong Castle was set up in 1363 after three years' construction. The castle only left some collapsed buildings caused by erosion.

Nine River Valleys Tourist Festival

From now until 31 March, Ziuzhaigou (Nine River Valleys) in Sichuan Province will be holding a grand winter tourist festival. The event is organized by Aba Prefecture People's Government, Sichuan Tourism Bureau and Jiuzhaigou Scenic Area Administrative Unit. Accompanied by magnificent snowy scenery, there will also be colourful Tibetan and Jiang minority festival performances. Tourists from home and abroad are both welcomed.

Huanglong Scenic Area Closes for Months

In order to better preserve the World Heritage site, tourists will be denied access to the Huanglong (Yellow Dragon) scenic spot in Sichuan Province from now on to 31 March. Located in northwestern Sichuan, Huanglong is famous for its beautiful landscape including the clean and clear lakes, snow-covered mountains, valleys and natural forests. Huanglong first began to close the tourism area in 2001, which has greatly improved the environment. Huanglong is the only world heritage site in China to close its tourism area during the winter.



Tibet

Be a Volunteer Worker at Hol Xil

As the Tibetan antelope is under high protection of the country, the Qinghai Hol Xil Administration Bureau has opened its arms to welcome volunteers from all over the world since May 2002. Here are some of the important information:

Basic requirements: 1. A passion for environmental protection and wild animals; 2. Have a strong will and healthy body, and be capable in working at an altitude of 5,000 metres and staying in the wild; 3. Have an education level at least of college or above (including undergraduates); 4. Aged under 45.

Once accepted as a volunteer, the person will be 1. Arranged to receive a short-term training at Golmud in Qinghai Province; 2. Then distributed to Budongquan, Wudaoliang or Tuotuohe protection station, work and live with the staff there for one month; 3. Before the start of every activity, the volunteer should prepare a proposal and plan, while afterwards the volunteer also has to submit a report or dairy about the work. The living necessities, transportation and medical fees will be covered by insurance company, and there is no limit to the volunteer's occupation, sex and nationality.

Website (Simplified Chinese): http://kkxl.enorth.com.cn
E-mail: kkxl@enorth.com.cn
Add: Hol Xil Administration Bureau, 88 Tongning Road, Golmud, Qinghai Province 816000
Contact persons: Wang Hailin: (979) 8410618, 8410133 / Lhalung Yongji: (979) 8410618, 8410509 / Guo Yongcuo: (979) 8410618, 8410113

Guangdong

Construction of Bruce Lee Memorial Hall in Shunde

A theme park with a statue and memorial hall will be built at Bruce Lee's southern Chinese ancestral home of Shunde, Guangdong Province. The park will also contain a martial arts academy and conference centre. The project is expected to be completed within three years.

China

China Becomes Most Popular Tourist Destination by 2020

China will rise to the world's top tourist destination before 2020, as foreseen by the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO).

China passed Italy last year to become the world's fourth most popular destination, and is nudging ahead of the United States to become the world's top tourist destination by 2020. Inspired by national economic growth, new reforms and its opening up, the tourism industry has greatly expanded in these years. From 1978 to 2005, the number of inbound tourists and revenues from inbound tourism increased 66-fold and 111-fold, respectively.

Travel

Great Wall a Favourite for New 7 Wonders

The biggest global vote ever, the New 7 Wonders of the World is expected to attract 19 million voters to select their seven favourite 'wonders', or most amazing and historical architectures. China's Great Wall tops the list of candidates for the New 7 Wonders of the World as voted by millions of people around the world, CRI reported.

Other promising candidates among the 21 finalists are the Roman Colosseum in Rome, India's Taj Mahal and the Pyramids of Giza in Egypt, the only candidate short-listed from the old Seven Wonders of the World. The New 7 Wonders of the World will be announced during the official declaration ceremony in Lisbon, Portugal on July 7, 2007.

Beijing

All Buses Equipped with Air-Con in 2007

Beijing's public transportation authority will deploy 2,500 new air-conditioned buses to serve the public in 2007. A total of 284 old buses on the streets will be upgraded with air-conditioning, so all of the buses in the city will have air-conditioning in the future. The old-style trains running on lines one and two of the subway system will also be replaced with air conditioned trains to provide people with a more comfortable ride during Beijing's sweltering summer. The city will also focus more heavily on developing the public transport services available in its 300 residential quarters. All quarters with more than 7,000 residents will be connected to public bus services.

Inner Mongolia

Alxa Becomes Hit Tourist Spot

Since it is titled national geological park, the Alxa Desert has become a new hit tourist spot in Inner Mongolai. The Alxa Desert National Geological Park has combined desert, oasis, gobi desert, canyons and weathered landscapes, among them most famous are the Tengger Desert, Badain Jaran Desert, and Juyanhai oasis. In 2006, Alxa has received a total of 650,000 person times of tourists.

Culture

Bilingual Library of Chinese Classics Released

According to the State Press and Publication Administration (SPPA), the bilingual Chinese-English books, Library of Chinese Classics, have better introduced Chinese culture to the outside world. Comprising 92 volumes, the 51 kinds of classic books cover famous anas, poetry anthologies and novels. Some are dated back more than 2,500 years.

For example, The Analects of Confucius is a Confucian classic which appeared in book form in the early Warring States Period (475—221 B.C.). It recorded the dialogues, stories and anecdotes of Confucius. Language barrier has hindered China to introduce its culture to the world. Since 1994, China has organized experts at home and abroad to translate these classics to enable more foreign readers have access to Chinese culture and literary works.

Shanghai

Shanghai Issues Special 'Tourist Passport'

Recently, Shanghai issued a batch of special 'tourist passports' to provide discounts, ranging from 10 percent to 50 percent, on tickets to the city's tourist attractions. Shanghai tourism authority plans to issue more than 1.2 million of the 'passports' to benefit tourists from foreign countries, neighbouring provinces as well as local residents. People can get these 'passports' for free at district tourism information centres. The authority will also hand them out during promotional activities.

The 'passports' provide discounts to more than 140 destinations in the city's 19 districts and county, and are published under one of seven themes, including countryside holiday, the birthplace of the Communist Party of China, science and discovery, food, shopping, city classics and culture and museum.

Shandong

Heze Being Selected as Peony City

Heze city is well known not only as the home of peony, but also as the homes of operas, martial arts, painting and calligraph. Caozhou Peony Garden, Varieties Garden, Ancient & Nowadays Garden, and the Hes' Garden are all the shrines. A lot of social cultural activities such as mass martial arts activities, operas activities, cockfighting and sheepfighting games etc, can make people get some idea of the historical culture of the birthplace of China's ancient culture. Recently, the city is also granted the title of 'Peony City of China', which is valid for five years.

Sichuan

Yalong River Building Hydropower Plant

China started construction of another major hydropower station, designed to have an installed capacity of 4.8 million kilowatts, in Sichuan Province. Known as the second-tier hydropower plant at Jinping, a bend in the Yalong River, the project involves a total investment of 29.8 billion yuan (about US$3.73 billion). It is scheduled to be completed in 105 months.

The new plant is the largest of a series of hydropower plants to be constructed on the 1,571-km-long Yalong River. Construction of the first-tier hydropower plant at Jinpin, with a designed installed capacity of 3.6 million Kw, began in November 2006, and will be completed in 2014.

Beijing

Beijing Hotels to Be Environmental-Friendly

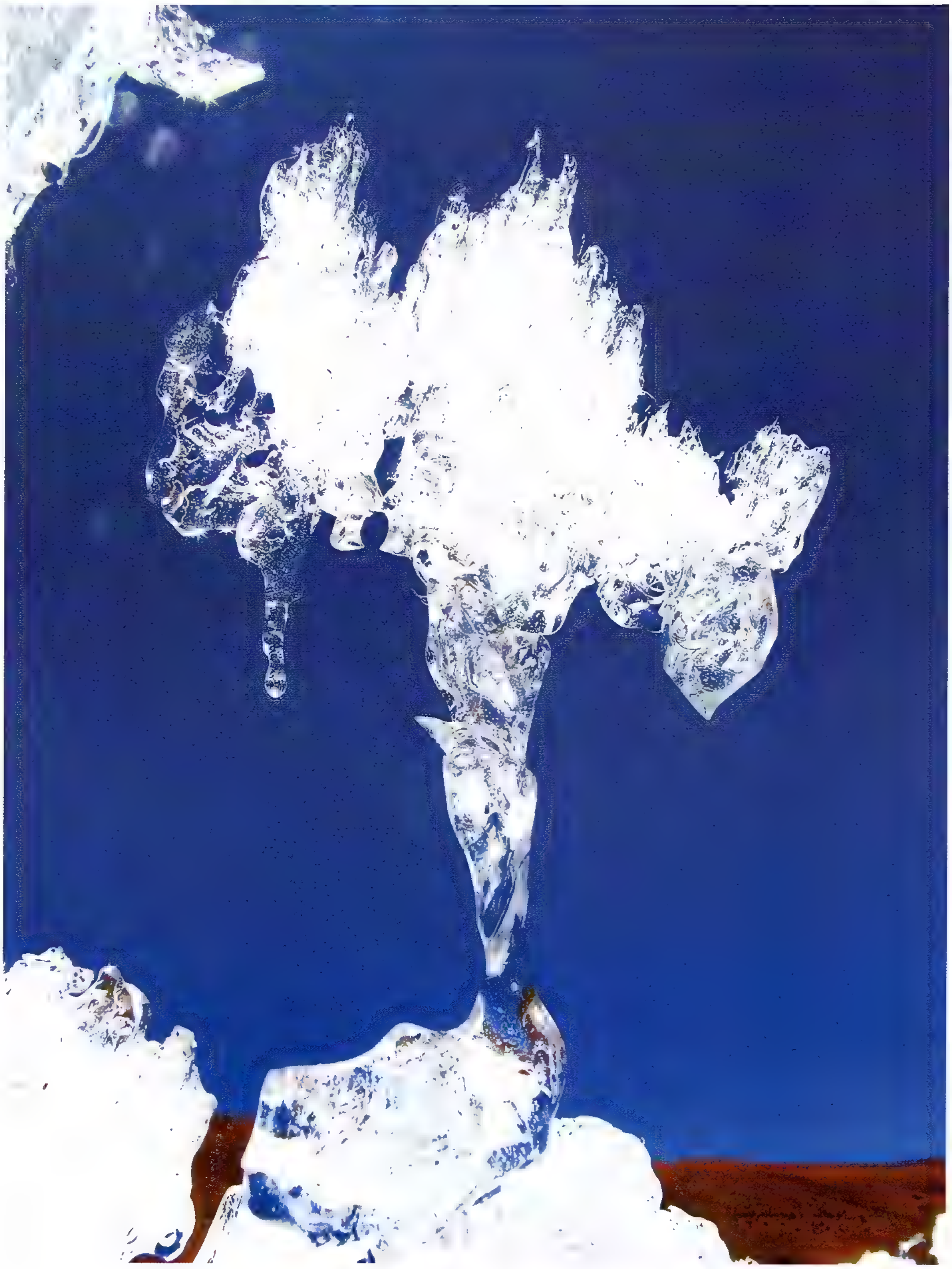
With the 'Green Olympics' as one of the three key concepts of the Beijing Games, the Beijing Organizing Committee for the 2008 Olympics (BOCOG) has determined that all hotels belonging to the extended 'Olympic Family' over the 2008 Olympic Games are required to pass an inspection designed to ensure they meet relevant environmental standards.

According to Xiang Ping, vice-director of the BOCOG Games Service Department, The work would be completed by the end of 2007. A total of 112 star-rated establishments have been designated as official hotels of the 2008 Games, but those that fail to meet the environmental standards will be struck off the list of Olympic hotels.

The Colours of Ice & Snow

Not all travellers are keen on winter as the weather is too cool to enjoy outdoor activities. However, it can be exceptionally attractive for photo buffs. The snowy scenery offers unlimited and inspiring scenes for the creative photographer. I'd like to share with you some tips of how to take good photos in a world of snow and ice.

Photos & Article • Adam Wong



A Natural Crystal Glass

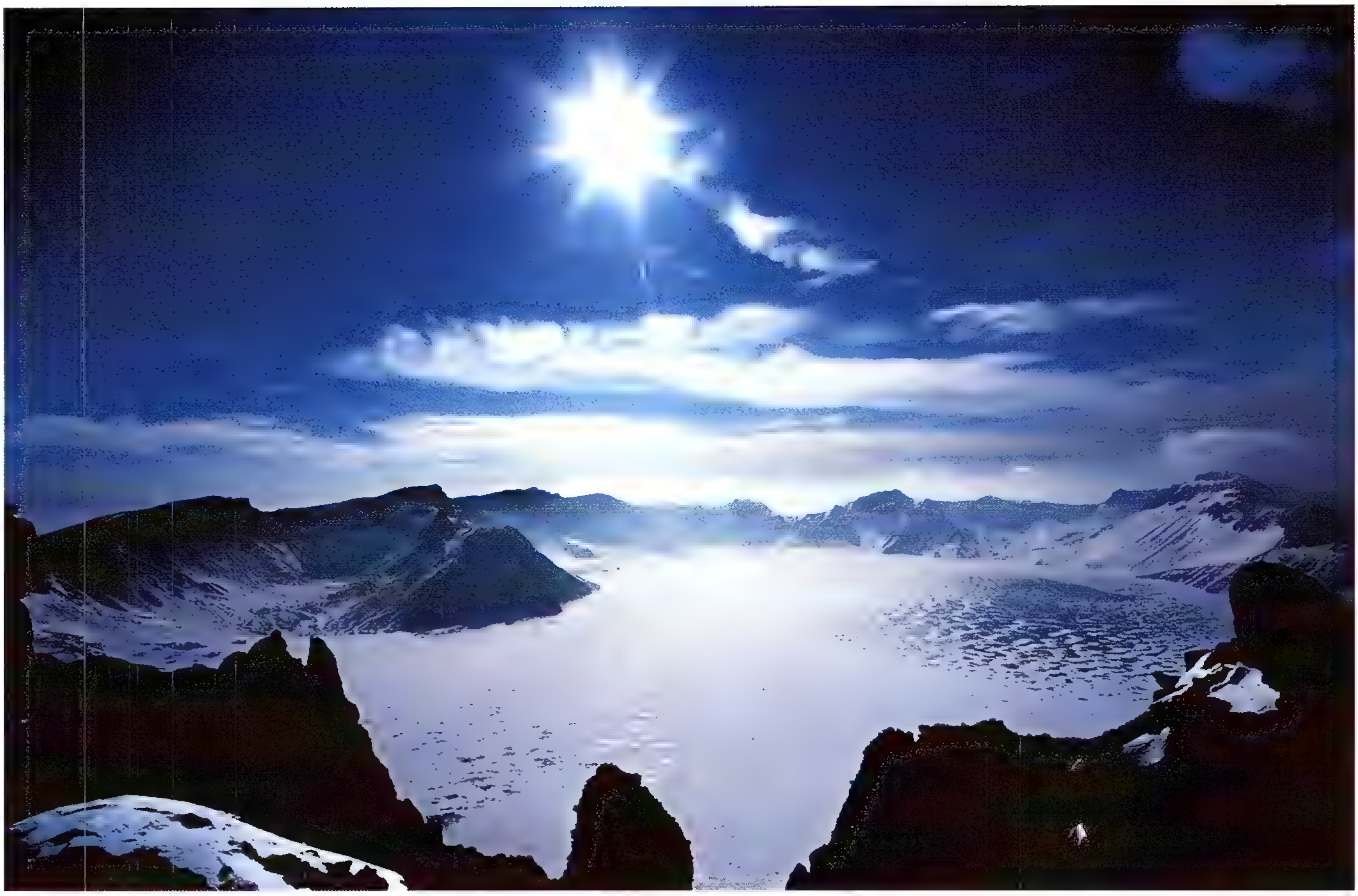
Location: Ghost Lake, Ngari, Tibet
The Ghost Lake near the Holy Lake of Ngari was still frozen in May. Icicles melted gradually under the sunshine, forming various strange shapes. I strolled in the gallery of 'natural ice-sculptures', as if hunting for treasures in an antique shop. Then, I suddenly found this 'crystal glass'. Just a second after I clicked my camera, it collapsed.
Photo parameters: CANON Pro1 digital camera; P exposure; hand-held shot; ISO 100

Snow-land Sensual

Location: Nam Co, Tibet
My friends and I were suddenly welcomed by heavy snow upon arriving at Nam Co Lake. The mountain ranges faraway and silver-white sky combined smoothly. A herd of black yaks, though strolling leisurely, burst into my camera lens.
Photo parameters: Hasselblad 503 CW (body); Hasselblad CF80mm (lens) added with Kodak Wratten 81A filter; Kodak E100VS reversal film; f8; aperture 1/125, hand-held shot.

Birch Forest in the Morning

Location: Changbai Mountains, Jilin Province
In the snow-white birch forest, the trees were standing still in the early morning. Whilst my friend concentrated on the right angle to shoot, he became the subject through my lens.
Photo parameters: Hasselblad 503 CW (body); Hasselblad CF80mm (lens); Kodak E100VS reversal film; f11; aperture 1/60; shoot on a tripod and external shutter cable release.

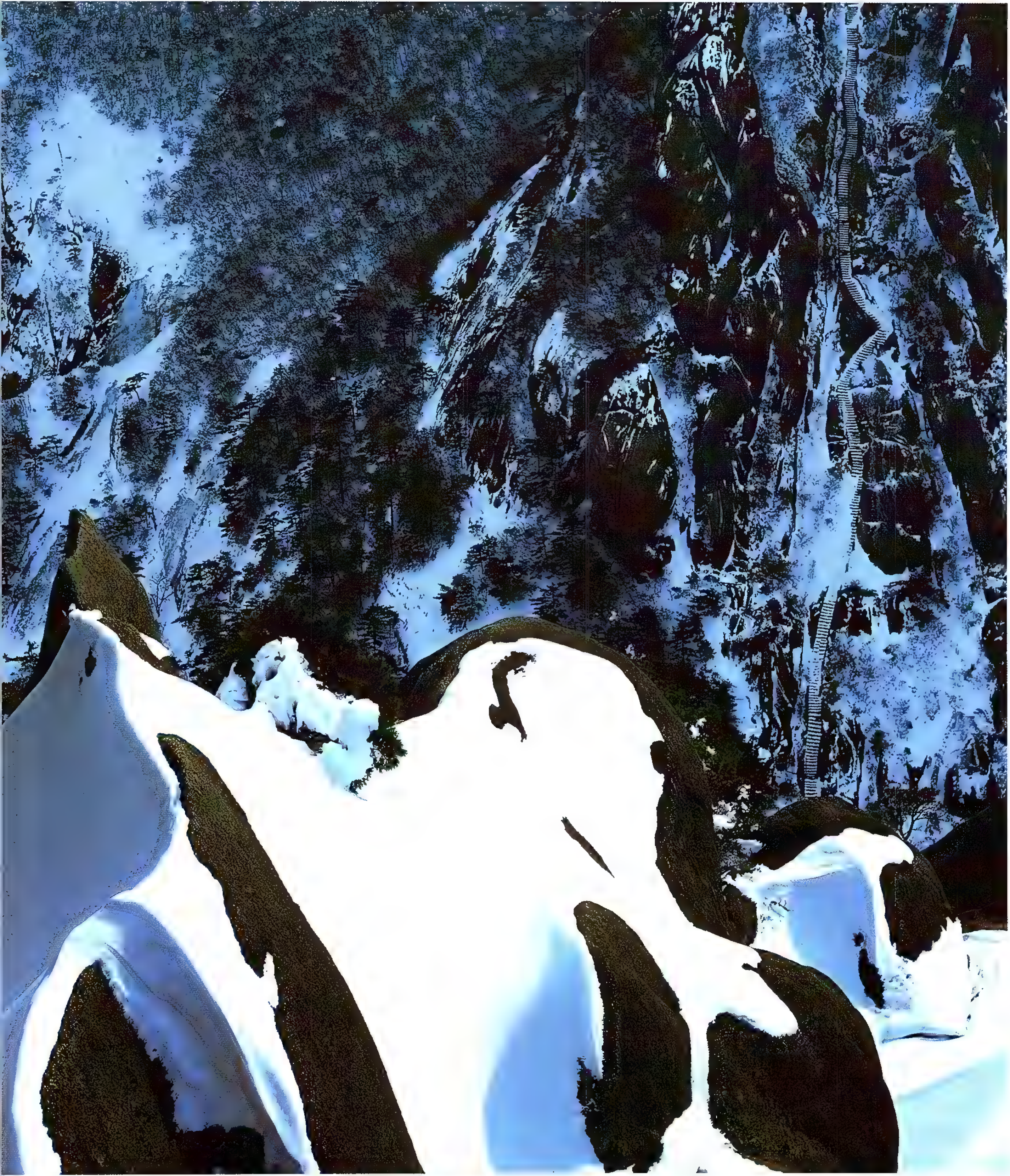


Heavenly Lake of Mt Changbai

Location: Tianchi, or Heavenly Lake, Mt Changbai, Jilin

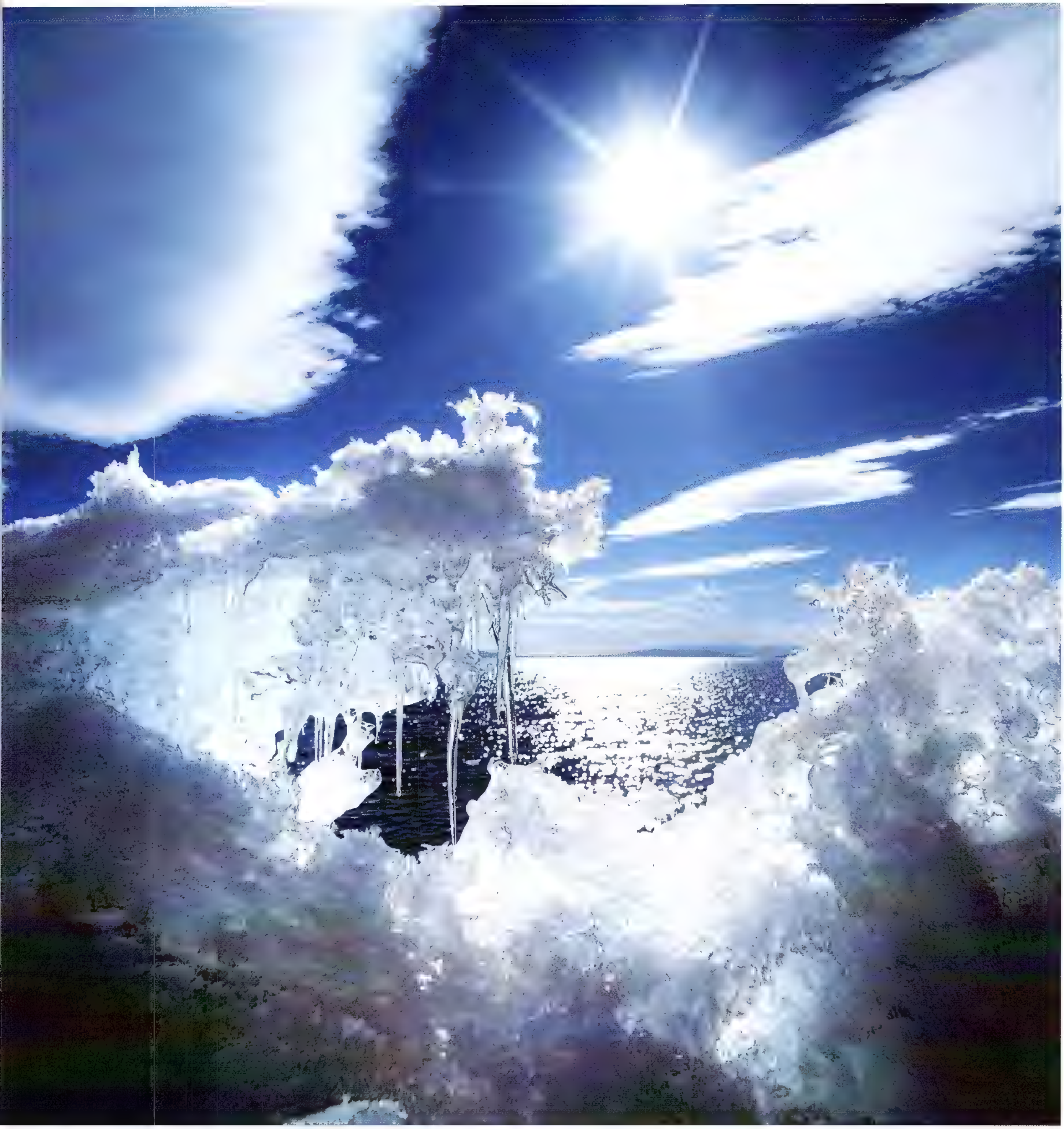
One minute's work by a photographer to produce a picture may have taken nature a thousand years of effort to provide the scenery. The mountain ranges around the lake appear primitive and vigorous. In fact, it took a great effort to shoot this scene. We started out early at 5 a.m. and as we set off the temperature was -30°C . We took a four wheel drive jeep to the top of Heavenly Lake to shoot the sunrise. Unfortunately, the mountain was so windy that we had to wait until after 9 a.m. when the weather was more stable. However, the northern wind was still so fierce as we arrived at the top we could hardly stand upright. We spent almost 20 minutes climbing a small slope of only 30 metres. One of my team-mates sprained his wrist and had to stop; he was soon joined by another two team members who also had given up due to the severe conditions and were returning.

Photo parameters: Knowing that the Heavenly Lake is expansive in width, I brought a Sigma 15-30 mm wide-angle lens. The body was a CANON EOS-1V; Kodak E100VS reversal film; f8; aperture 1/250, hand-held shot.



Shapes of Snow on Yellow Mountain

Location: Viewed from Yupinglou Hotel on Yellow Mountain, Anhui Province
From Chinese New Year's Eve to Chinese Valentine's Day (15th), I was completely absorbed in the winter snow of the Yellow Mountain. Overlooking Tiandu Peak from the bedroom of Yupinglou (Jade Screen Hotel), I saw the sun shining on accumulated snow on the huge rocks, with Tiandu Peak hiding quietly behind. Together they appeared like a portrait of Chinese splash-ink painting. It was really captivating.
Photo parameters: Hasselblad 503 CW (body); Hasselblad CF120mm (lens); Kodak E100VS reversal film; f11; aperture 1/125, hand-held shot.



Sunset at Holy Lake

Location: Holy Lake, Ngari, Tibet

Although the ice mounds were melting at sunset I still carefully looked for the best angle to shoot. By choosing the crystallized ice as the foreground, I included the sharp sunshine and reflection of lake water in the shot. The contrast of light and shadow has revealed the charm of a highland lake.

Photo parameters: Hasselblad 503 CW (body); Hasselblad CFE40mm (lens); Kodak E100VS reversal film; f22; aperture 1/125, hand-held shot.

Shooting Your Best Winter Photos

Even though we can wrap ourselves in clothes that can stand temperature extremes as low as -20 ~ 30°C, we also need to consider the effect of climate on our equipment. Like human beings, they can also 'catch cold'. So, although the digital camera may be your favourite, I would suggest you also bring a manual film camera. The latter one will always be more stable under low temperature.

Equipment

Both Canon EOS 1V film camera and EOS 1Ds Mark II digital camera can only resist a temperature of about -10°C whilst the Nikon F5 film camera will be 'impossible' even under -5°C. As for me, so called 'old-fashioned' cameras are always my best partners – the Hasselblad 500 series, Nikon FM2 and Canon F-1. They continue to work normally even under temperatures of -30°C in the wild. If you only have digital cameras, then be prepared to bring more batteries and avoid exposing the camera for a long time. Hide them in your coat after every shot and as soon as possible.

Other equipment required can include a remote shutter release, a Polaroid camera for initial shots to give you an idea of potential pictures and an X-ray resistant bag for the checkpoint at the airport is needed for film. Filters are also crucial for taking good photos. During cloudy and snowy days, the photos always tend to be bluish or greenish. Then, white balance is effective to adjust the colour temperature. If you are using film cameras, you may add a Kodak Wratten 81A filter (its colour is amber) to correct the colours. Another kind of filter, known as 'graduated' has its colour gradually change to dark grey in its upper part and is suitable for shooting a sunrise or sunset – when the light contrast between the sky and land is large. The grey part can darken the sharp sunlight in the sky.

Protection

Equip yourself with a firm tripod when setting off to a windy place in winter. Photographers arriving in snowy areas always face a problem: the camera's lens can be covered by a layer of vapour which can stay for a long time. This is caused by the large difference of the outdoor weather and the indoor temperature where the camera has been stored. To solve this, hide the body of the camera in your coat or keep it in your bag in the car and expose the lens to the outdoor temperature first. If you put the camera into a bag when outside don't take it out immediately when returning to indoor areas, because water droplets will be concentrated on the lens. Never leave your bag which carries the film rolls near any heater – the films will be 'cooked'.

Clothing

China is such a vast country that the Southern climate is completely different from the North. In the winter of Northern China, the temperature contrast is very large. It is important to prepare well to prevent being cold. Basic clothing should include a super warm, down coat, a pair of gloves, knitted hat, sleeping bag and waterproof snow boots. Also include sun and ice-resistant moisturizing cream, a travel-friendly hair dryer (which can also be used to dry socks), small chains known as 'boot chains' or lightweight crampons wrap around your boots to allow walking on icy ground, dark UV sunglasses (to prevent snow blindness), electronic heatable eggs or warm stickers, are all your 'helpers' when shooting in cold areas.

Reminder

The best times for winter photography are the morning or sunset. Keep in mind that the daytime is especially short at this time of year. Hence, plan your trips carefully to capture the best moment.

A world of snow and ice is undoubtedly captivating, but be particularly aware of the exposure settings on the camera even when you become extremely excited with the fairy-like scenery. If the photos come out too pale it is because the snow is so bright, coupled with high reflection and it has 'mislead' the automatic exposure settings of the camera. To prevent this, switch to manual control and raise the settings of the exposure one or two levels, known as 'stops', on the camera dial according to the reflection level. If you are using a digital camera, try different levels of exposure and take more than one shot until you are satisfied. Consult your camera's manual for more information. When testing exposure or content of a photo, it's better to first focus on a colourful subject then the picture will appear livelier. Of course, black-and-white photos can also express a sense of simplicity and elegance.

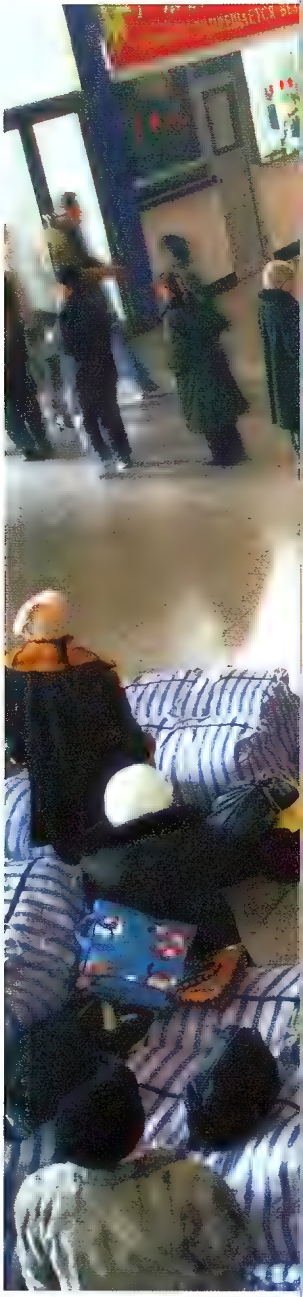
Wusuli

China's Easternmost River

Photos & Article • Xie Guanghui

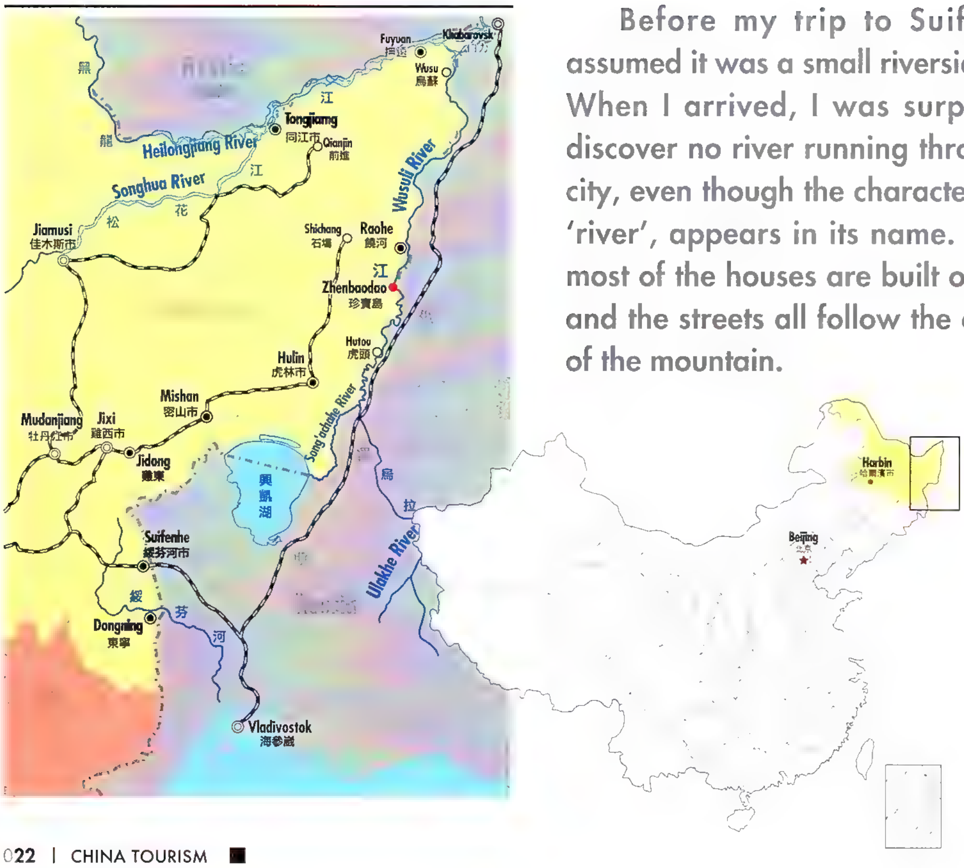
In the far east of China's Northeast region runs a river called Wusuli (also known as Ussuri). The river has two sources: the Wula River, to the east; and the Song'acha River, to the west. They meet to form the Wusuli, which runs south to north through Mishan, Hulin, Raohe and Fuyuan before joining the Heilong (Black Dragon) River in northeast Fuyuan. The land either side of the Wusuli River was originally Chinese territory. In 1860, however, after the signing of the Convention of Peking between China and Russia, the latter took control of 400,000 sq km east of the river, transforming it into a watery national border.

Guards stationing at the Sino-Russian border of Zhenbao Island.



Suifenhe—

Sino-Russian Trade Hub



Before my trip to Suifenhe, I assumed it was a small riverside town. When I arrived, I was surprised to discover no river running through the city, even though the character *he*, for 'river', appears in its name. Instead, most of the houses are built on slopes and the streets all follow the contours of the mountain.

1. In the mountain town of Suifenhe, many streets are sloped; take care when walking in winter.

2. Laden with newly bought goods, Russian merchants await the train home.

3. Hard-sleeper compartments on the Sino-Russian train packed with passengers and luggage.

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The Suifen River, which runs along the border between China and Russia, originates from Changbai Mountain. It courses north and turns east at Dongning before entering Russia, where it turns again, to the south, and empties into the Sea of Japan via a bay in Vladivostok. It seemed odd that the Suifen River did not pass through the city that shared its name; I wanted to know why.

River Town with No River

After China's defeat in the Sino-Japanese War of 1894, Japan occupied the Liaodong Peninsula. Under pressured from Russia, France and Germany, Japan eventually allowed China to buy back the territory at the cost of 30 million taels of silver. This event gained China a reliable ally in Russia. In June

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1896, Li Hongzhang, a minister of the Qing court, signed a co-operative convention with the Russian government to keep invaders at bay. Article 4 of this agreement allowed Russia to build a railway in China's Jilin Province that would reach to the port city of Vladivostok (known as Haishenwei in China) to help transport Russian armies and provisions efficiently and safely. Railway construction began two years later in the wild Northeast. The railway's fifth stop on the line from Vladivostok was to be called Suifenhe, the chosen site being on the banks of the Suifen River. But when it came to the actual construction of the line, the engineers soon realized that it would be too difficult to build on the terrain in the section from the river valley to Taiping Ridge. The designers were forced to move the line 50 km north, but as the name of the station had already been chosen, it remained Suifenhe town — the river town with no river.

Tracking History

So Suifenhe's fate was set. As soon as the Sino-Russian Railway began operation in 1903, merchants from several dozen countries flowed in looking for business opportunities. Entire families arrived; markets and streets were quickly followed by residential housing and villas. Many Russian and European-style buildings remain.

Just over 100 years old, Suifenhe Railway Station is a typical Russian structure. Trains from Vladivostok stop here to have their axle shafts changed because the Russian track gauge is different from that of China. Passengers are mostly Russian women who buy and sell products to make the most of the price differences between the two countries. Chinese tourists to Russia prefer to take the more expensive but faster long-distance bus. But this is a waste of an adventure, because there is so much history to absorb along a century-old railway. Would a visitor to Hong Kong miss the chance to ride the tram? Such experiences are an essential part of the journey.

Talk the Talk

Lively crowds gather on the square in front of the station whenever the daily international train arrives. Russian passengers head straight for their hotels. After a short rest, they hit the shopping centres and department stores to purchase their goods. Straightforward shoppers, Russians usually make their deals fast, though they always bargain for the best price.

Although these Russian merchants travel frequently to Suifenhe, few speak fluent Chinese. By contrast, the Chinese shop clerks speak much better Russian. Shops in the popular Qingyun Market(青雲市場) display both Chinese and Russian on their signs. When Russian customers arrive, the clerk approaches them with a big smile, describes the goods in fluent Russian and helps them make their choices. A Russian need not worry about the language barrier in Suifenhe: hotel, restaurant and shop workers all speak fluent Russian. Even taxi drivers can communicate to a degree.

Job adverts displayed on Suifenhe's streets always include the ability to speak Russian as desirable. It's almost essential in finding local employment. Consequently, numerous language training courses have been set up and enrolment notices appear throughout the city. Russian is definitely the second language of this port city.

Besides catering to Russian customers, many shops simply go by Russian names, such as the Katyusha Store and the Saharin Restaurant. Some foreign trade and tourism workers even take Russian names, as this helps them bond with their customers and makes communication and business transactions much easier.

Made in China, Sold in Russia

Suifenhe's urban district is not that big, but it is a hub for Chinese commodities sold to Russia. Besides such large shopping centres as Qingyun Market, Manhattan United Commerce Town, Suifenhe Department Store, and International Trade Town, there are many shopping centres specializing in shoes, bedding and daily necessities. These large-scale shops are mostly managed on contract and their wares fall into two categories: goods for export to Russia; and goods imported from Russia. The customers, of course, are both Chinese and Russians.

Many merchants in Suifenhe are from East China's Zhejiang Province. One shop owner, a native of Zhejiang's Wenzhou, told me the majority of his goods come from southern China, including various so-called Russian products, such as telescopes, military knives, and the famous nesting dolls. Due to their low cost, many Russians buy them here and take them back to Vladivostok to sell to Chinese tourists. It seems a little strange, but these days it's the same the world over. I asked him if there were any genuine Russian-made souvenirs anymore. 'Whisky, cigarettes and chocolates,' he said. 'That's all.'

Tourism is Suifenhe's other pillar industry. Attractions include the National Gate, a museum, the Eastern Orthodox Church, Guangming (Brightness) Temple, the Rentou (Man's Head) Building (once the Japanese consulate), Watching Post 605 and Cave No. 3, which marks the Sino-Russian border on the railway. These tourist sites attract many Russian visitors, making Suifenhe the busiest entry port in Heilongjiang Province. Meanwhile, more than 500,000 Chinese visit Russia via Suifenhe every year, with most of them going to Vladivostok.

1. Outside Qingyun Market.

2. The Rentou (Man's Head) Building, built in 1914, is so named for decorative face carvings on the exterior. It was the Japanese consulate in the 1920s.

3. The Makcum bakery offers Russian coffee, cakes and bread.

4. Neon Russian signs light up the night in Suifenhe.

5. Leaving church after Mass.

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Haishenwei is a famous non-freezing harbour and is known as the 'gate on the sea' of Russia.

Vladivostok —

Russian Naval Base

After acquiring 400,000 sq km of Chinese territory in 1860, Russia built their military base on the Pacific in Haishenwei (literally, 'Ruling the East'), which they renamed Vladivostok. The city became Russia's largest port on the Pacific and the headquarters of its Pacific Naval Fleet. Vladivostok is considered the 'east gate' to Russia.

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1. Young women on a Vladivostok street.
2. A bronze statue of Lenin in a downtown square.
3. Early morning ice fishing — it's -20°C!
4. A ship carrying second-hand cars at famous, non-freezing Golden Corner port.
5. Camel rides attract tourists.
6. An icy catch!

The tourist group I joined from Suifenhe to Vladivostok passed through the port, and we boarded a bus filled with both Chinese tourists and Russian merchants. Not long after we were on the road, we were stopped at a military checkpoint. The Russian national flag fluttered under the azure sky. A young, expressionless soldier boarded the bus to check every passenger, comparing passport photos to faces. When he finished we drove for another half hour before stopping in front of a big building. The driver told us to get off and take our luggage with us, to pass through the entry port. We alighted and queued up with our passports in hand. Our tour guide had told us we could not bring cell phones into Russia, so I had left mine at the Suifenhe hotel. At first I felt eerily disconnected from the outside world, but then I was glad my trip would not be interrupted by calls and text messages.

No Wrong Left or Right

The entry procedure was slow, even for the Russian citizens. Polina, our Russian guide, strode toward us. A beautiful blonde college student 1.7 metres tall, she had a small bag slung over her shoulder and puffed on a cigarette. She told us she was working to make some pocket money during her winter vacation.

We re-boarded the bus and headed out on a highway bordered by alternating swathes of dense forest and vast wilderness. Occasionally, we passed wooden cottages and small towns. The sparsely populated area had a lonely feel. At dusk, we arrived in Vladivostok, another city built on hills. The narrow roads go up and down.

It resembled the Chinese coastal cities of Qingdao and Dalian, but with more space. Wherever we went, we travelled by car. There is said to be one vehicle for every three people in Vladivostok. Oddly, some cars are left-hand drive while others are right-hand drive. Polina explained that although Russia's automobile industry developed very early, it produces only two or three types of cars today, of merely ordinary quality. So only government officers, the army and police use domestically made right-hand drive cars.

Imported vehicles are too expensive for common Russians, so they buy second-hand, left-hand drive cars made in Japan and Korea. A nearly new Toyota may cost just US$2,000; this, and low gas consumption make Japanese and Korean cars favourites among locals. The government does not mind the position of the steering wheels as long as all vehicles drive on the right side of the road. Drink-driving cases are rare in Russia because the punishment is heavy: offenders are fined, stripped of their licenses, and may be sent to prison.

At twilight, we reached the Armur Hotel, which stands against a hill and faces the sea. It must be wonderful in summer, when surging waves crash against the bank. But the sea was frozen now. Then we entered the hotel... through the roof of the building! Once inside, we took an elevator down to our rooms. It felt like going into a coal mine. Our rooms were on the fourth floor, but we needed to go up to reach the 'ground' floor. It took awhile for many in the group to get used to this.

I opened the curtains in my room and watched the sunset through the window. The sky changed from light yellow to orange and, eventually, dark purple, ushering in the beauty of a tranquil night.

Letting It All Hang Out

The government of Vladivostok has developed various entertainment draws for tourists, including casinos, military displays and mixed-gender strip shows. All of them enticed me. Our tour guide warned us not to go out at night, but the group leader came to our room to persuade us to go to a striptease show,

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adding that we would never see such a thing in China. In a low voice, he explained that we could get front-row seats with a 10-ruble (RUR) tip. Then he produced a bundle of bills.

The show took place on the hotel's ground floor. It wasn't advertised with garish lights, so it was obviously just for hotel guests. Several young men dressed in black stood at the entrance to a small, poorly lit hall. In the middle stood a platform surrounded by seats filled with other Chinese people. We greeted one another, but the collective embarrassment was evident.

As the music started and the stage lights came up, a young Russian woman walked to the centre of the platform. She danced wildly at first, but as the beat slowed, her moves became more sexually suggestive and she winked at the guests. Eventually, she removed her clothing, piece by piece, while walking off the platform into the audience. Some people turned away in shyness, but others offered her tips. All the performers, both men and women, had beautiful, shapely bodies. The male audience members stared fixedly at the women dancers, while the female guests shrieked in delight at the gyrating men.

Fooling the Fish

Our tour was to last three days, but in fact, there was only one full day of fun, the rest of the time being spent on the road. I set my alarm for 5 a.m. The next morning I headed straight for the frozen bay, tramping through an empty beach volleyball court. The Suifen River enters the sea through this bay, but in winter, it's all just a mass of snow-covered ice. The wind was fierce and frigid. I pulled up my collar and narrowed my eyes. In the distance, I noticed several dark shapes. As I approached, I saw they were men holding fishing poles and sitting on stools by holes cut in the ice. They were bundled up in warm overcoats

1. Frozen Armur Bay becomes a giant skating pond.

2. The A.K.Arseniev Museum, dedicated to the famous Russian writer, ethnologist and geologist.

3. St Nicholas Church in Vladivostok.

4. Religious books and souvenirs on sale at St Nicolas Church.

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and hats.

Fish would be drawn to the weak light coming through the holes, mistakenly thinking spring had come. The silent fishermen jiggled their small poles to attract the fish. If one got a catch, the others would acknowledge him with a congratulatory glance. Hearing my steps, they all turned to me and gestured for me to keep quiet. I slowed my pace and they smiled and winked at me in greeting. One of them waved me over to see his catch. He had a dozen or so small fish in his basket. It must be a great fun to fish on the ice in winter.

I took a wrong turning on my way back to the hotel, but this brought me to the A.K.Arseniev Museum. A.K.Arseniev was a famous Russian writer, ethnologist and geologist. In 1902, he led several exploratory trips to the 400,000-sq km area situated between the Wusuli River and the Pacific. After leaving the museum, I still could not find my way. Since I spoke no Russian, I couldn't ask anyone for directions. So I decided to walk up the hill, hoping to spot my hotel from the top. Fortunately, I found it before I had walked very far.

Military Museums

A peninsula, Vladivostok enjoys a temperate ocean climate. It is also the terminus of the Siberian Railway, as well as the gateway to various Asian countries on the Pacific.

Atop Eagle Nest Hill, I had a panoramic view of the city. Downtown sits by Golden Corner Bay. To the east is the broad Wusuli Bay, a summer resort with numerous beaches. Along shallow Armur Bay, more than 10 km to the west, there is a convalescent area of many of famous Russian sanatoriums.

In winter, both the Wusuli and Armur bays are covered with ice so thick they look like huge skating ponds. But the chilly weather had no effect on Golden Corner Bay. Though not far from the other bays, its waves surged and roared. A Russian ship loaded with second-hand Japanese cars was docked there. This port, with an annual handling capacity of five million tons, is the second largest of its kind in Russia's Far East Economic Development Zone, after Nakhodka. I could see several gunboats farther out to sea. The world-famous non-freezing harbour is also the base of Russia's Pacific Fleet.

The Submarine Museum is in an actual submarine, the C56, which served the Soviet Navy in WWII. More than 70 metres long, it looks like a giant whale. A photo of the captain and his crew is on display inside. The caption is written in both Russian and Chinese, a nod to the many Chinese visitors.

Similarly, the Cannons Museum was formerly an imperial Russian fortress built to defend its Pacific coast. Exhibits range from ancient armour and long swords, imperial Russian guns and Soviet machineguns, mines and cannons to more modern weapons currently used by the Russian Army. Outside, warship guns, shore cannons, rockets, missiles and torpedoes, as well as armoured vehicles, are on display. Every day at noon, guns are fired to commemorate Peter the Great, the famous Russian Tsar. The ceremony I watched was simple and took only a minute. One soldier conducted the whole ritual — filling the barrel, firing it and removing the shell. It attracted the tourists and the sound was deafening.

End of the Line

I also visited the Vladivostok Railway Station, terminus of the Siberian Railway, completed in 1912. The yellow structure has three arched gates and a roof that turns up at the ends. Decorated with numerous spires, it resembles a daisy viewed from afar. Two mural groupings are painted on the ceiling inside: one depicts city scenes, including such recognizable structures as the station itself, the Naval Fleet and a locomotive, as well as historical figures like Nicolas II, the last Tsar of imperial Russia, and the Far East administrator; the other is of urban Moscow. The Russian national emblem, a two-headed eagle, is also painted on a wall.

At the back of the railway station, linked to it by an overpass, is the ocean port. Ships can reach the Sea of Japan by sailing south from the right bank of Golden Corner Bay. The port is 1,930 nautical miles from Dalian; it takes 20 days to ship goods to Dalian, but only two days to reach Japan. On the other side are some Russian islands, behind which lies the base of the Russian Pacific Fleet, which is closed to the public.

1. Wooden nesting dolls are favourite souvenirs from Vladivostok.

2. Vladivostok's Central Square.

3. Elegant Vladivostok Station on the Sino-Russian Railway.

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Dongning—
Japan's Largest WWII Base

Dongning is the southernmost county seat of Heilongjiang Province and the closest Chinese town to Vladivostok. Due to air currents off the Sea of Japan, it enjoys a pleasant climate, with neither cold winters nor hot summers. With its rich resources, Dongning is celebrated as 'a southern town in the north'. The city was also Japan's largest military base in WWII, and many military batteries remain.

I drove from Suifenhe to Dongning and finally saw the Suifen River as I approached the county town. From its source on Changbai Mountain, the river runs east, passing through mountains and forests. The town of Sanchakou sits in the alluvial plain of the valley. Sanchakou's population is primarily of the Korean ethnicity. Dongning, meanwhile, faces Russia on the other side of the river. Each country has established an entry port on their respective banks. Dongning is 164 km from Vladivostok, the biggest Russian seaport in the Far East.

170,000 Pairs of Hands

Xunshan Fortress is a tourist attraction in Dongning. On 18 September, 1931, the Japanese army invaded Northeast China's Shenyang Province, which was known as the 918 Incident. Soon after the Japanese built two large-scale military fortresses to fight against the Soviets. Xunshan Fortress is one of these, the other being Hutou (Tiger Head) Fortress in Hulin County. Xunshan Hill is on the Sino-Russian border, 7 km south of Sanchakou. Its cliffs are dangerously steep and its forests are luxuriant, good for hiding from the enemy. The fortress covers 50 km from east to west and 110 km from south to north, including three major concrete batteries built into the Shenghong, Miaogou and Northern Tianshan mountains. Each of them has three underground fortresses and several hundred permanent ground facilities, along with an airport for military use. Construction of the Xunshan Fortress lasted three years and was carried out in secret. Altogether, 170,000 Chinese labourers were forced to build the largest Japanese military base in Asia in WWII.

Withdrawal of the Soviet Army

The main battery is situated atop a mountain on the frontline of the border, making it hard to reach. Its facilities were considered advanced for their time.

Most of the Dongning batteries were purposely destroyed. To date, a dozen or so underground military facilities have been uncovered. Local governments cannot afford to refurbish them, although a small section is now open to tourists. Many of these batteries were not damaged in battle and remained in good condition until the Japanese surrendered. It was the Soviet Red Army who sent its engineering corps to blast them before they withdrew from the area, fearing they could be a threat.

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1. Japan's largest WWII Asian military base abandoned in Dongning. Besides underground batteries, there is also a military airport.

2. Many Russians come to China on business via the Dongning entry port.

3. Semis drive past this stone tablet marking the China-Russia border every day.

4. The entry ports of China and Russia viewed from Dongning.

5. Some 170,000 Chinese labourers were forced to build the Japanese fortress in Dongning.

Xingkai Lake—

Source of the Wusuli

1. Locals fish on Xingkai Lake in winter, breaking the ice and dropping in their nets.

2. A village on the north shore of the lake.

3. The Beidahuang Memorial Museum at the site where General Wang Zhen headed the reclamation army.

This crater lake was formed from an ancient volcano. The water runs northeast to form the Song'acha River, which turns north to join the Wusuli River.

Xingkai Lake has had different names through history. It was Meituo Lake in the Tang Dynasty (618—907), and the Beiqing Sea in the Liao (907—1125) and Jin (1115—1234) periods. Its current name hails from the Qing Dynasty (1644—1911). The two characters xing and kai are Manchurian for 'water runs from a high place to a lower place'. Covering 4,380 sq km, it is the world's fourth largest lake. Comprised of the Greater Lake and the Lesser Lake, it drinks in nine rivers.

A Shared Lake

Following the Convention of Peking signed in 1860, the larger part of the lake, from the main waterway linking the mouths of Song'acha and Baisuo rivers to the south, was given to Russia, together with the vast land area east of the Wusuli River. Just a third of the lake is now Chinese. Thanks to the rich wetlands around Xingkai Lake, tens of thousands of birds shelter here in spring and autumn during their migrations. The lake is filled with more than a dozen species of fish, including carp, silk carp, crucian carp and whitefish, the latter being the most famous. Whitefish is considered one of the 'three treasure fishes on the border' in the Northeast, the other two being salmon from the Wusuli River and mudskipper from the Suifen River.

I left Mishan for Dangbi Town on the north bank of the lake. As it was winter, few people were on the street, and business was slow in the souvenir shops, BBQ restaurants and holiday villages. Everything seemed frozen in ice and snow while the tourist town waited for spring to arrive. Dangbi is in an arrow shot from the Russian border town to its south. The bridge, upon which military officials meet, is two or three metres long. It may be the shortest border bridge in the world.

No Success without Sacrifice

Most of the town's residents are farmers. The first generation arrived in the 1950s, as soldiers of the 100,000-strong reclamation army headed by Wang Zhen. Today, many of the farms on the Sanjiang (Three River) Plain, between the Fudan River and Hulin, are identified by numbers beginning with eight, indicating the originally reclaiming army. Another huge group came in the 1960 ~ 70s, when some 560,000 young people answered Mao Zedong's call to 'go to the countryside, the border areas, and wherever you are most needed by your country'. The photos displayed in the Beidahuang (Great Northern Wild Land) Museum show the wilderness during that period. When relations broke down between China and the Soviet Union and border tensions increased, the young farmers conducted the reclamation by farming and building houses during the day and picking up their rifles to serve as guards at night. Being young and strong, they successfully tamed the wild land to harvest rice, barley and soybeans, eventually turning it into today's Great Northern Granary. However, the success of the reclamation was gained at the expense of the wetlands, which were once the largest of their kind in the world.

Fishing On Thin Ice

I did not see another single visitor while in the Xingkai Lake Tourist Area. The officials on duty played cards on a heated kang, or brick bed. When I turned up and asked to see the lake, they were surprised. After staring at me for quite a while and whispering together, one of them put down his cards to pull on his overcoat and fur hat. He took me to the lake despite the biting cold.

Several fishermen were drawing a net up from a hole in the frozen lake surface. As the temperature of the water under the ice was higher than that of the air, a thin, silken mist rose and wrapped itself around the net. The Russians on the far bank of the lake do not fish in winter, so the fish cleverly hide in the water on that side. In summer, local fishermen row their boats to the division line where their fishing nets occasionally float over. Although it's no serious breach, the Russian patrol ship continually drives them away. But one of the young men told me that every year when the first cold Siberian current arrives, the braver among them carry food and their fishing gear by motorcycle to the middle of the lake under cover of night. If they're lucky, they can catch several thousand kilograms of fish worth 7,000 ~ 8,000 yuan.

I doubted the Russians would allow this, but he said with pride: 'When the lake is frozen, the motorboat can't move and the ice is too thin to support a regular vehicle. So the patrols can do nothing about it.' After a pause, he added, 'All of Xingkai Lake used to belong to China and the Russians took two-thirds of it from us.' 'What if the ice cracks?' I asked. 'Everything will be gone if the weather suddenly turns warm,' he said in a low voice.

As I left the lake, I noticed torn fishing nets abandoned at the gates of some houses. The scene touched and worried me. It was a shame there were fewer and fewer fish available on the Chinese side; but it seemed worse that people risked their lives by going out onto thin ice.

Translated by Gloria Shang

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Zhenbao Island—
Under the Cloud of War

The classic melody *Boat Song of the Wusuli River* conjures up images that attract people to visit the area. But the river is even more famous for an incident on tiny Zhenbao Island, one that nearly triggered a Sino-Russian nuclear war.

Upon arriving at Hulin, I was eager to see Zhenbao Island, but the 0.74-square-metre island is patrolled by government troops. Visitors must join a tour group to gain access, but travel agencies told me tours were only available in spring, after the river thaws. So I went to the Hulin Tourist Bureau for help. Office Director Mr Xing asked why I chose to visit in winter. I explained that because the Zhenbao Island incident happened in wintertime, it seemed to be the best season to get a feel of what the environment and atmosphere had been at the time. 'It might be a good selling point to encourage winter tourism,' Xing responded after a moment. I was surprised at his immediate consent. Had he been one of the soldiers stationed there decades ago?

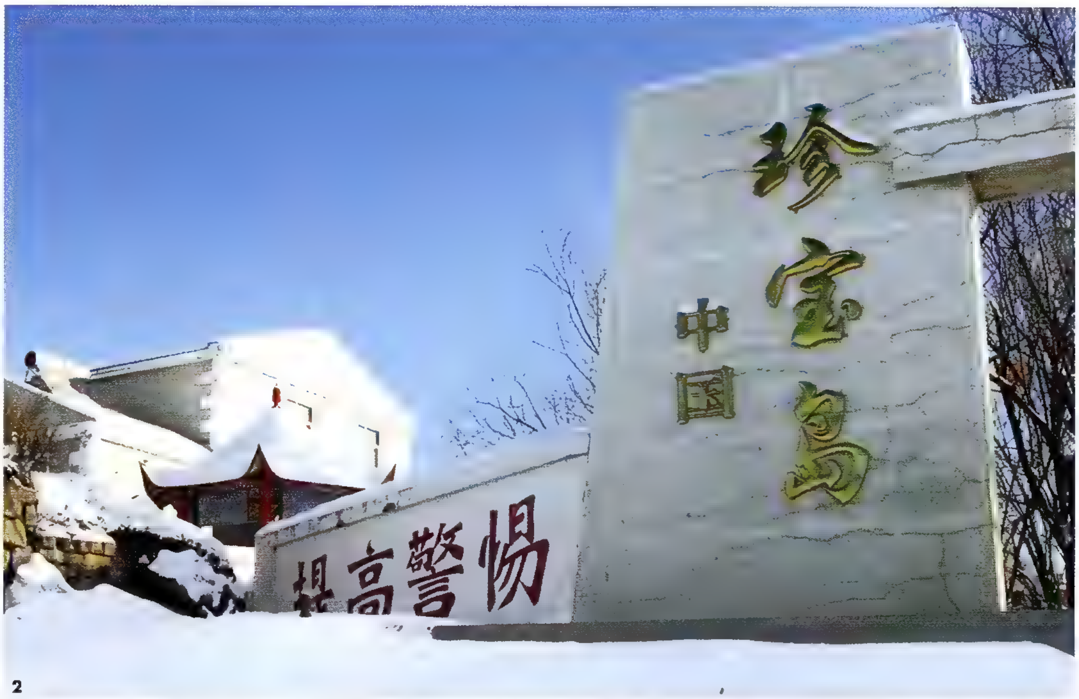
In Harm's Way

Director Xing and I set out from Hulin at dawn in a four-wheel drive jeep. I loved the sound of the snow crunching under our wheels as we barrelled towards the Wusuli River. After four hours, we left the river and drove into the mountains. The 529 Heights — the Zhenbao Island Front Headquarters at that time — awaited us. We parked and hiked up a wooded path past an array of trenches and bunkers that looked like giant mushrooms. On some level ground atop the hill stood a stone table and a few stone stools. We climbed a nearby observation tower, from where I could see the Wusuli River winding around the green mountains like a silvery ribbon. Russia lay just across it. Looking down from the 529 Heights, I saw an island embraced by the left bank of the river. Director Xing pointed: 'That is Zhenbao Island.'

As we came back down from the 529 Heights, we arrived at the frontier troops' barracks where a company commander showed us to a meeting room. He said in winter, there is nothing but ice and snow. He obviously pitied me for visiting in winter, but Director Xing explained my reasons. If tourists come in summer by boat, they get no real sense of the history of the place. The commander nodded his agreement before reminding us not to wander about as there were still many mines in the ground.

Visible History

A traditional clay-brick structure, typical of the northeast, stands at the Wusuli River ferry pier. In summer boats leave from here for Zhenbao Island. Now, in the dead of winter, we simply walked across on the frozen water. A young soldier awaited us at the barracks gate. Recruited from Zhuji just six months before, he spoke with a Zhejiang accent. Groups of soldiers have come and gone, and three rounds of



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1. A bird's eye view of Zhenbao Island from 529 Heights.

2. Military fortifications of the frontier troops stand at the island's main gate.

3. Hutou Fortress defence works built by Japanese troops during WWII.

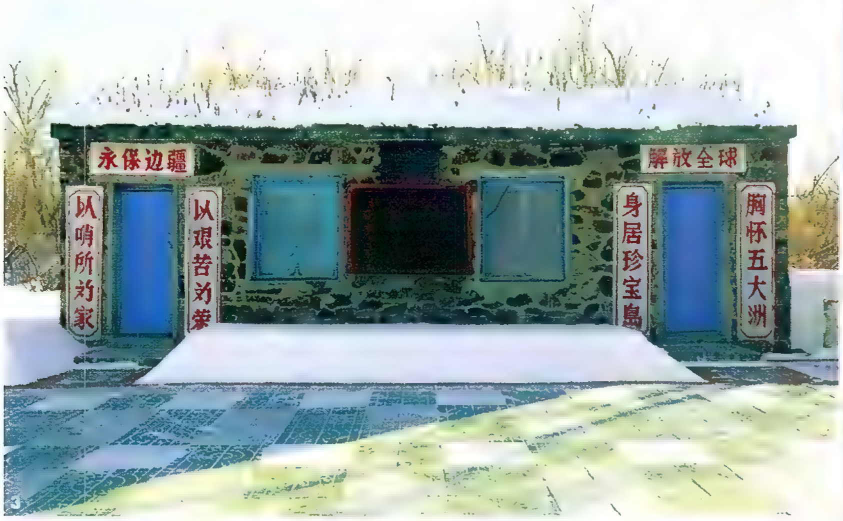
barracks have been built here. The first were low, small stone buildings. The second were made of fabricated cement slabs. The newest are two-storey grey brick buildings with red roofs. Obviously, the soldiers' living conditions are improving. We were impressed by the couplets on the various barracks' gates. The oldest gate bears the phrase: '身居珍寶島，胸懷五大洲' (Shen Ju Zhenbao Dao, Xiong Huai Wu Da Zhou) which means 'Though living in a small land like Zhenbao Island, we care about the whole world'. A huge, exuberant toothed oak known as the Hero's Tree is covered with red scarves; martyr Yang

1. Military structures: witnesses to history.

2. This family lives near the Wusuli River at the national boundary.

3. Older military buildings on Zhenbao Island.

4. The huge bronze tiger by the Wusuli River is a Hutou landmark.

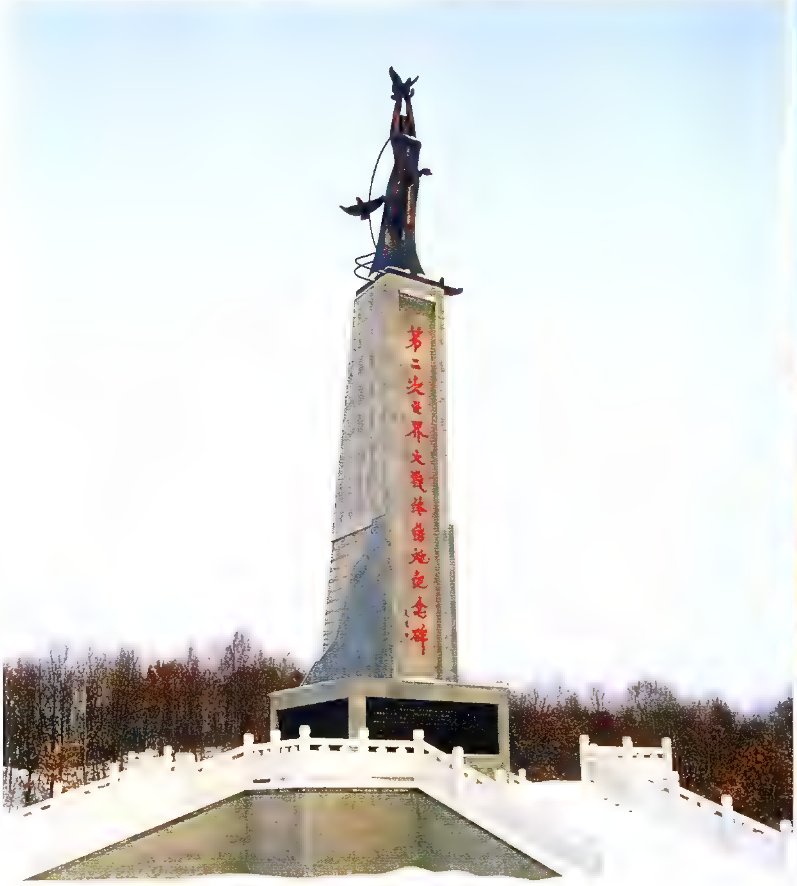


covered with red scarves; martyr Yang Lin died here decades ago. The small Hero's Lake lies just beyond the tree. The road leading to the main gate, called Shanghai Road, is crossed by Beijing Road and Nanjing Road, built, as they were, by soldiers from these cities to bring a bit of home to their posting.

An exhibition hall on the island includes photos and displays explaining the island's history before and after the Zhenbao Island incident.

Hutou Town — Oriental Maginot Line

From atop the sentry tower of the frontier Hutou



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1. A monument commemorating the end of WWII in Hutou.

2. Hulin is a big granary area in northeast China. Workers busily bag grain.

3. Traditional barns typical of the northeast have good ventilation.

4. Guandi Temple, dedicated to Guan Yu, God of War, is the northernmost temple in China.

5. The exhibition hall displays many weapons and other articles used by the invading Japanese troops during WWII.

(Tiger's Head) Town by the Wusuli River, I could see the frozen river and the Russian city of Iman just across it. A huge bronze tiger, a symbol of the town, stands by the river, as does a Guandi Temple, dedicated to Guan Yu, the God of War. This is the northernmost temple in China, built during Emperor Yongzheng's reign in the 1820s ~ 30s by penitents who prayed to cross the river safely to dig for ginseng. Hutou Town has seen many battles throughout history. After Japan occupied Northeast China, the Japanese forced Chinese labourers to build the secret Hutou Fortress in six years and kept it heavily guarded. The fortress consisted of aboveground and underground military batteries. The former included barracks, an army hospital and a hidden fort. To reinforce their heavy artillery, Japanese troops moved the largest cannon in Asia to Hutou and equipped the fortress with a rail cannon bought from France. The network of underground fortifications stretches to Menghu (Fierce Tiger) Mountain, Hubei (Northern Tiger) Mountain, Huxiao (Tiger's Roar) Mountain and Huxi (Western Tiger) Mountain, all dug under the mountains and built with reinforced concrete. Each underground military fortification had its own headquarters, communications section, arsenal, power-generating station, kitchen and latrines. Hutou Town was dubbed an Oriental Maginot Line for its large-scale defence system, solid military edifice and complete military outfitting.

On 9 August, 1945, the Soviet troops attacked Hutou with tanks, airplanes, cannons and Katyusha rockets, but the Japanese put up a dogged resistance with the help of their strong underground defence network. Although the Japanese Emperor announced an unconditional surrender on 15 August, fighting continued here until the 26th, when the Soviets took over the town.

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Zhenbao Island incident:

An armed border clash that shocked the world broke out between Chinese and Soviet troops over the sovereignty of a small island in the Wusuli River in 1969.

Zhenbao Island was originally attached to the left bank of the Wusuli River, but it was eventually separated from the mainland by flood waters. Located on the Chinese side of the main channel, it is an isolated island at flood time, just 100 metres from China and about 300 metres from Russia. During the dry season, when the beaches lie bare, it is connected to the left riverbank and thus forms a peninsula. It has been part of China throughout history. In the 1960s after the Soviet Union called back large numbers of its experts from China, the relationship between the two countries deteriorated. In March 1969 more than 70 Soviet border guards, two armoured vehicles, a truck and a command car drove onto the island and opened fire, killing and wounding many Chinese soldiers. The Chinese patrol fought for an hour in self-defence and drove back the invaders. Later, the Soviet troops returned with reinforced numbers. Some 200 foot soldiers, 20 tanks and 30 armoured vehicles attacked the Chinese army and civilians on the island. The Chinese fought hard for nine hours before defeating the Soviet troops. The Soviet Union staged yet another attack on the island, which Chinese soldiers answered with gunfire. The incident brought the two countries to the brink of full-scale war.

Today it just sounds like an isolated conflict, but it had quite an impact on China at the time, prompting large numbers of people in the surrounding areas to evacuate their homes for safer ground. People throughout the entire country started to dig underground tunnels and store up enough grain should nuclear war break out. Instead, the incident broke a deadlock in world relations, and pushed China and the United States closer together, eventually leading to President Nixon's historic visit to China in the early 1970s. Subtle changes in the relationship between China and the United States, and that with the Soviet Union, soon followed.

Raohe—
A Border Trade Town

On the middle reaches of the Wusuli River and midway along both Siberian rail lines, Raohe is one of China's largest ports exporting to Russia's far east. Facing Bikin, a Russian border city in Khabarovsk across the river, Raohe has easy access to land and water transport, which leads north to the heart of Europe and south to Vladivostok.

Early the next morning, I hired a car to take me from Hutou Town to Raohe.

Bartering in the 1920s

Raohe is just 15 km from the Russian town of Bikin, which is even closer than the nearby Chinese county towns. The two places began bartering with each other in the early 1920s, trading such daily necessities as Chinese cloth, wine, animal hides, cabbage and brooms, and Russian salt, petroleum, leather overcoats and guns. The border trade was lively, with each side getting what it wanted and giving what was needed. Nowadays Bikin is one of Russia's most active modern ports in its far east, but the majority of its goods come from Raohe. Though not a big town, Raohe has quite a few malls conducting international trade. I hurriedly ran through a few of them, all of which seemed to target Russians.

1. Russia's Bikin Port across the Wusuli River from Raohe.

2. Russian visitors in Raohe.

Happy Holidays

Tall, stout Russians hauling heavy luggage pant as they lumber down the streets of Raohe. If they have too many bags to carry, they hire a motorized tricycle. While some Chinese tourists may be duped by tricycle drivers who take unnecessary detours, the Russians can't be fooled as they have been doing business in Raohe even longer than the tricycle drivers who dare not risk offending their main clients. Every year during Christmas and New Year, thousands of Russians flock to Raohe for their holidays, as China has better quality goods on sale and cheaper food. At such times this border county town of 140,000 explodes in a heady festive atmosphere, with all the hotels fully occupied, the beer sold out, and the streets crowded with people making merry and enjoying themselves to the full.

Fuyuan — First Light of Day

Fuyuan County is in the extreme east of China, and Wusu Town sits at the furthest northeast corner of the country, where the Heilongjiang and Wusuli rivers meet and flow into Russia. Its geographical location means this area is the first to catch China's daily sunrise.

Leaving Raohe, and the Wusuli River for the moment, I turned north onto delta area, the result of the alleviation of the Songhua, Heilongjiang and Wusuli rivers. As Fuyuan emerged on the horizon, I noticed the straight highway was free of cars. Large tracts of birch woods stood in orderly fashion on both sides of the road, shocking the eye with their strong, lustrous colour. Fuyuan covers 6,260 sq km, making it six times Hong Kong's size but with only one percent of its population. With an average arable land area of over 30-*mu* (2 hectares) per capita, it is the richest Chinese county in this particular respect.

Stocked with Salmon

Fuyuan has rather developed water transport facilities. Only 65 km from Khabarovsk, the largest Russian city in the Far East, Fuyuan is a key port in the integrated Chinese-Russian river-sea transport system. From here, a freighter can pass Russia through the Tatar Strait to reach Sakata Port in Japan. In winter its port is closed, and hovercrafts stop running as the river is frozen. Travel agencies handling tours to Russia also go into hibernation. The lively Chinese-Russian trading market will not come to life again until spring. The shops, restaurants and hotels are quiet with few visitors. The streets are nearly empty, and taxis seldom

1. 'The First Sentry Post in the East', where the Wusuli and Heilongjiang rivers meet. This border post is in the extreme east of China.

find passengers at the long-distance bus station.

Fuyuan is rich in chum salmon. These large North Pacific salmon are a sleek, elongated shape, with a metallic greenish-blue back, a silvery belly and irregular purple spots. Male chum salmon have hooked snouts; the female, straight ones. They swim back upstream to the place where they hatched in order to spawn and die there. Meanwhile, their offspring head to the sea, repeating the cycle. Every year just before summer, flocks of chum salmon swim across the Okhotsk around the Tatar Strait and into the Heilongjiang River. As the Wusuli River is clear with a gravel bed, the chum salmon like to lay their eggs there. As a result of over-fishing in the past, the number of chum salmon in the Wusuli River began decreasing year by year. But now with an artificial hatching centre and large quantities of young fish released into the river every year, the chum salmon population is recovering rapidly.

Fuyuan also boasts the Huso dauricus fish species, which can weigh from 100 kg to more than 500 kg. The fish not only has delicious meat, but its stomach, lips, bones, and eggs are also considered delicacies. Caviar made from the highly nutritious dark green eggs is dubbed 'black gold'. Fuyuan is China's breeding centre for Huso dauricus and chum salmon, with an annual hatching of 50 million Huso dauricus.

Sunrise at 2 a.m.

In China's furthest northeast corner, Wusu Town receives the earliest daylight in the country. During the summer solstice, the sun appears just after 2 a.m., allowing the little town to enjoy a significantly longer day than the rest of China. Apart from the fishing season when fisherman descend en masse, Wusu is inhabited by just one family. Nicknamed 'the First Town in the East', due to its location, it's also home to

1. A Fuyuan County Town neighbourhood.

2. Wusu Town on a map of China.

3. A national boundary tablet at the Wusuli River.

4. Fuyuan is China's Huso dauricus breeding centre, hatching 50 million of the species annually. This is a model of a Huso dauricus.

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'the First Sentry Post in the East'.

The sentry post is actually a watchtower for the frontier army. Situated at the meeting point of the Wusuli and Heilongjiang rivers, it affords a view of the frozen Wusuli River directly below and Russian mountains stretching north as far as the eye can see. Looking northeast through high-powered military binoculars, I could see Khabarovsk half hidden in mist. The Wusuli River winds northeast until it disappears over the horizon, but I would not follow it. My trip was now at an end.

Translated by L. Yu

Epilogue Years ago one golden autumn my colleague Huang Yanhong set off from Mohe County (Issue 273) to travel west to east along the Heilongjiang River all the way to Wusu Town. On this trip, I travelled north from Dongning County following the ice and snow along the Wusuli River before also ending up in Wusu Town.

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Wusuli River Border Trip — Travel Tips

Photos & Text • Ma Yiu Chun

Transport

By air:

Harbin Taiping International Airport is the second largest international airport in northeast China. With regular flights to over 30 Chinese cities, including Beijing, Tianjin, Shanghai, Guangzhou, Shenzhen, Hangzhou, Nanjing, Shenyang, Dalian, Xi'an, Qingdao, Wenzhou and Xiamen, it also has routes to Russia's far eastern Khabarovsk, Vladivostok, as well as Seoul in South Korea and Shinkata in Japan. To reach the airport, which is more than 30 km from downtown, take the economical airport bus at 12 yuan per seat. The bus stops at Kang'an Road, Anfa Bridge, Jiaohua Square, the Railway Station, and Museum Square, and terminates at the Aviation Hotel. By comparison, a taxi to downtown costs about 150 yuan (including thruway toll).

By rail:

The first Chinese city to build a railway line, Harbin is a key railway hub in northeast China. Five trunk railway lines — Harbin-Dalian, Harbin-Suifenhe, Harbin-Manzhouli, Harbin-Bei'an, and Lafa (Jiaohe)-Harbin — all have their terminus here, with trains running to dozens of large and medium-sized cities such as Beijing, Shanghai, Dalian, Wuhan and Zhengzhou. It also has international trunk lines to Russia and Korea with frequent regular trains. Please note that there are two railway stations in Harbin: Harbin Railway Station, where most trains stop; and, Harbin East Railway Station. Normally, trains setting off from Harbin East Railway Station do not stop at Harbin Railway Station.

By car:

Harbin is the highway hub of Heilongjiang, with a network of roads to major cities within the province, including Jiamusi, Tongjiang, Mudanjiang, Suifenhe, Jixi, Daqing, and Qiqiha'er. Several national and provincial highways also pass through the province. In addition to the Longyun Company Passenger Transport station, Harbin's general bus station has three sub-stations at Nangang, Sankeshu and Daowai. The long-distance bus is not recommended for travel in winter, because trains are generally available to all destinations. But for Jiamusi, Tongjiang, Mudanjiang, Qiqihar'er, Yichun and Hegang, the long-distance bus is fine, since buses to these places are well-appointed and road conditions are quite good. Bus travel is also more convenient and faster as the buses run more frequently than trains.

Climate

Winter in Heilongjiang Province is cold and long, and most parts of the province are frost-free only six months of the year. Pack for freezing winter weather and dress warmly when going out. Most buildings in the north are well-heated and insulated, making a winter there more comfortable than one in the south. No matter how cold it is outside, indoor temps are kept at over 20°C, sometimes resulting in a difference of 60°C between the two. Therefore it is crucial that you bundle up before going out, but be sure to remove your extra layers once indoors again, to prevent catching cold.

Tourist Attractions along the Wusuli River

Suifenhe

A beautiful city nestled in mountains, century-old Suifenhe is filled with charming Russian and European-style architecture dating back to its early years. Suifenhe is Heilongjiang's most important port for Russian trade, and the most convenient passageway into Vladivostok. Many local travel agencies offer a variety of tours to Russia. Hong Kong and Macao residents can give or fax copies of their passports and home-visit permits to a travel agency to apply for a one-entry visa and join the tour the next day. A tour to Vladivostok costs about 1,800 yuan per person. Rubles can be exchanged with the guide at a low rate before departure. Express trains and buses run daily between Harbin and Suifenhe and continue on to Vladivostok. Be patient passing through customs; even resident Russians cannot pass through quickly.

*** Please note that according to the latest regulation, group tours from Suifenhe and other ports to Vladivostok are suspended for the moment.**

Transport: Take a direct train or bus from Mudanjiang (193 km). Buses run every 30 minutes.

Accommodation: New Century Hotel

Add: 48 Shancheng Road, Suifenhe Tel: (453) 393 3016

Vladivostok

As a transport hub in Russia's far eastern region, Vladivostok is a world-famous, ice-free port. Lying 9,288 km from Moscow, it is the terminus of the Siberian Railway and the starting point for ocean-going vessels heading to Asian and Pacific countries. Major tourist attractions include: the Submarine Museum, the Railway Station, Golden Corner Bay, the Central Square, the A.K. Arseniev Museum, the Cannons Museum (where a cannon is fired off daily), St Nicholas Cathedral and Svetlanskaya Street.

Transport: Suifenhe is 230 km from Vladivostok; the two cities are connected by rail and highway.

Dongning

Xunshan Fortress is 7 km south of Sanchakou Town, which is near the China-Russia border in eastern Dongning County Town. The fortress faces Russia across a river. After 918 Incident in 1931, the Japenese built two large military fortresses in eastern Heilongjiang along the Sino-Russian border. One of these, Xushan Fortress, was also the largest Japanese military base in Asia at the time.

Transport: Take a long-distance bus from Suifenhe or Hunchun City in Jilin Province to Dongning, then change to a bus for Sanchakou. Tell the driver you want the fortress, otherwise the bus stops at Sanchakou only. Then make an appointment with this or another driver to pick you up again. Allow yourself two hours to see the fortress. Dongning is also an entry way to Russia; tour groups can leave from here to reach Vladivostok.

Accommodation: Dongning Gong'an Hotel

Add: Next to the Dongning Public Security Bureau **Tel:** (453) 366 9040

Accommodation: Dongning Jixin Plaza

Add: 98 Fanrong Street **Tel:** (453) 362 8900

■ Xingkai Lake

Lying southeast of Mishan City, Xingkai Lake is another boundary between China and Russia. Measuring 90 km from south to north, and 50 km from east to west, it's a low-level lake with large stretches of marshland to its north and a fine white sand beach.

Transport: Take a train or bus from Mudanjiang to Mishan, and change to a bus for Dangbi Town. The world's smallest boundary bridge, at Mishan Port, is not open to the public, but with a local as your guide, the border guards may allow you a visit. The topmouth culter of Xingkai Lake is one of China's four best-known freshwater fish, a delicacy not to be missed.

Accommodation: The Xingkai Lake area has two hotels: the Training Centre of the Personnel Bureau and the Training Centre of the Planning Commission. Both close in winter as there are few visitors.

■ Zhenbao Island

Situated in the middle reaches of the Wusuli River on the Chinese side of the main channel, Zhenbao Island is just 0.74 sq km in size. In March 1969, an armed border conflict erupted between China and Russia here. The dispute over the sovereignty of the island came to be known as the Zhenbao Island incident. This green island is still patrolled by China's frontier troops and tourists must ask for permission from the military to tour the island. There are still many mines on the grounds, so visitors are advised to stay in known safe areas.

Transport: Take a train from Harbin, Mudanjiang or Jixi to the Dongfanghong Tree Farm; then change to a bus for the Wulindong Tree Farm. Buses to Wulindong are also available from Hulin and Hutou. There is no bus to cover the 25 km between Wulindong Town and Zhenbao Island, so you must hire a taxi. A round trip costs 80 yuan (ask your driver to include a stop at the 203 Heights by the Wusuli River; from here you can view the whole island). The reasonable taxi fare includes waiting time and the contact needed to go to the 203 Heights. If no taxis are in sight, ask around at the Wulindong bus terminal or nearby shops. Tourists can walk across the frozen river to reach the island in winter. In other seasons, hire a small motorboat to cross the 100-metre-wide river, at a cost of 40 yuan/ person/ round trip. In fact, 20 yuan should be enough, but since there is only one business operating there, the boatmen claim they have to beg the frontier guards for permission. Be patient and bargain with them.

Accommodation: As there is no hotel on Zhenbao Island, stay at the basic Wulindong Tree Farm guesthouse for 15 yuan/ person/ night. However, it is closed in winter, as is the guesthouse at Hutou Town.

Area Tourist Attractions:

▲ Hutou Fortress

Located in Hutou Town, this fortress is one of two large-scale military fortresses built on the border between eastern Heilongjiang and Russia by Japanese troops after they occupied northeast China. A nearby museum exhibits relics, pictures and related data and documents. Visitors can also tour the underground military fortifications.

▲ Hutou Guandi Temple

The temple, which dates from the early 1700s during the Qing Dynasty, was built by ginseng collectors who wished to pray for safe passage over the river.

Transport: Hulin can be reached by train or bus from Harbin and Mudanjiang. Change to a bus for Hutou Town at the Hulin bus terminal; the 63 km between Hulin and Hutou Town can be covered in 1.5 hours for about 10 yuan.

■ Raohe

Raohe County, situated in Heilongjiang's northeast border area on the middle reaches of the Wusuli River, faces Russia's Bikin City in Khabarovsk across the river. Along with its rich underground mineral resources, Raohe, a 'land of fish and rice' in north China, has benefited from its position on the Sanjiang Plain.

Transport: There is usually no bus to Raohe in winter, so hire a car from Hutou. The three-hour journey costs about 180 yuan.

Accommodation: Dongyuan Hotel

Add: Central Street, Raohe County **Tel:** (469) 562 5666

Area Tourist Attractions:

▲ Sipai Hezhen Folklore Garden

Near the Wusuli River in Sipai Township, Raohe, this is a Hezhen village. An ethnic minority of northeast China, the Hezhen live mainly in the Tongjiang, Fuyuan and Raohe areas. Visit the exhibition hall to learn about the customs and traditions of the Hezhen people. A folk art workshop, Hezhen totem poles, and a traditional Hezhen residence — *zuoluozi* (an umbrella-shaped tent of birch bark and animal skins, which has an open top to let smoke escape) — are on display here.

Transport: Take a bus from the Raohe bus terminal.

■ Fuyuan

On the China-Russia border, Fuyuan used to be called Suiyuan County. Businesses appeared here as early as 1904 to engage in trade with Russia. Wusu by the Wusuli River in eastern Fuyuan is China's easternmost town, and the first town in the country to see the sunrise every day, hence the nickname, 'First Town in the East'. Only one family lives here year round, but there is also a sentry post in the town. During fishing season, it fills up with fishermen, formerly mainly Hezhen, but now most are Han. Two small restaurants in the town also serve as hostels.

Transport: Poor road conditions in winter mean no direct buses run to Fuyuan. Visitors may hire a car from Tongjiang City or the Qianjin District: take a bus from the Fuyuan long-distance bus terminal to Wusu Town. The only bus to the town leaves daily at 1:00 pm and reaches Wusu Town at 3:00 p.m. The 56-km ride costs 15 yuan. The bus returns to Fuyuan from Wusu at 5:30 a.m. the next morning. During the tourist season, a steamboat runs from Fuyuan to Wusu Town via Khabarovsk, fare: 50 yuan. In summer, stay at the Wusuli River Restaurant, which has earthen heated kang beds, cost: 10 yuan/ person/ night. There is no such service in winter.

Accommodation: Yuanxing Hotel

Add: Ping'an Street, Fuyuan County **Tel:** (454) 213 1705

Drumbeat Amidst the Yellow Sand

A New Year at

Photography Trip Northern Shaanxi

Photos Ma Yiu Chun, Stephen Or et al | Article Stephen Or

The *yangge* dance in Ansai is truly a breath-taking performance. (by Ma Yiu Chun)

From the year-end to the middle of the first Lunar New Year month, people in northern Shaanxi Province located in Northwest China will host a parade of festive celebrations. Whether you are a desperate backpacker or a photo buff, you will surely have the time to experience a fabulous Chinese new year there!

Itinerary

Day 1 Hong Kong -Xi'an

Fly from Hong Kong to Xi'an in the evening, taking photos of the city's nightscapes and taste the Muslim snacks. Stay in Xi'an.

Day 2 Xi'an - Tomb of the Yellow Emperor - Hukou Waterfall

Visit the Tomb of the Yellow Emperor (Huangdi Ling) at noon, and shoot the frozen Hukou Waterfall at sunset. Stay in Hukou.

Day 3 Hukou Waterfall - Yan'an

Tour Baota Mountain, Yangjialing, Zaoyuan (Date Garden), visit the farmers who live in cave dwellings along the Yellow River, and experience the Chinese New Year on the Loess Plateau. Stay in Yan'an.

Day 4 Yan'an - Ansai

After breakfast, depart Yan'an for China's 'home for waist-drums' - Ansai. Appreciate Ansai's paper-cutting art in the morning, and shoot the jubilant waist-drum and yangge dance parades in town in the afternoon. Stay in Ansai.

Day 5 Ansai - Mizhi

Shoot the morning scene at Qiankun Bend of the Yellow River, visit the villages on the banks of the Yellow River. In the afternoon, go to Mizhi and visit the Jiang's Villa and former palace for rebel general Li Zicheng. Besides, taking pictures of Mizhi ancient city, its famed local beauties and Suide men. Stay in Mizhi.

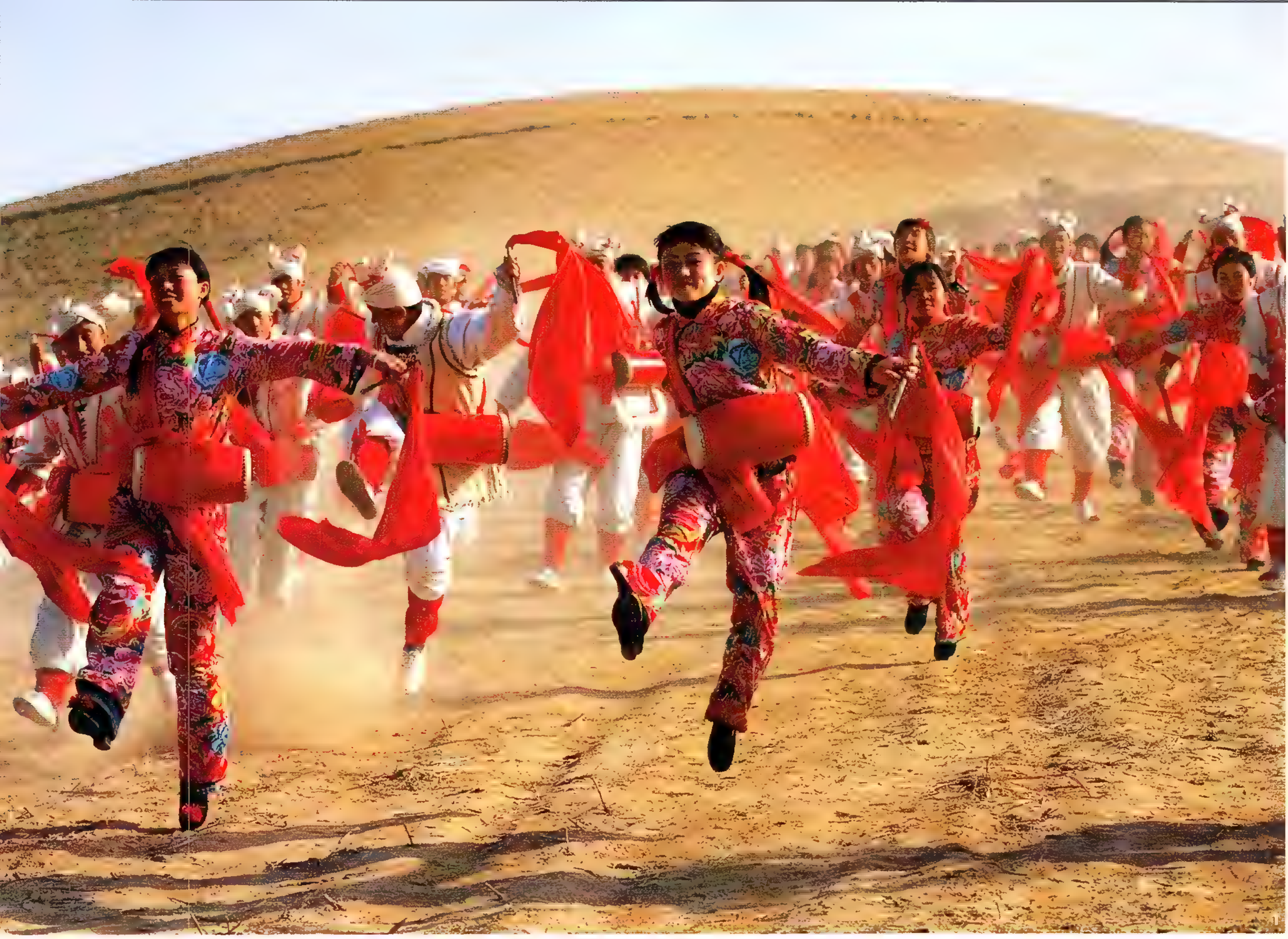
Day 6 Mizhi - Jiaxian - Yulin

Leave Mizhi for Jiaxian in the morning, climb Mt Baiyun (White Cloud) to visit renowned Taoist Baiyun Temple and Xianglu (Incense Burner) Temple. Then, photograph the Shaanxi-Shanxi Grand Canyon and the meandering Yellow River. After lunch, arrive in garrison town Yulin, cliff stone carvings at Hongshixia (Red Stone Gorge), etc. Stay in Yulin.

Day 7 Yulin

Enjoy local celebrations in the morning: yangge dance parade, stilt-walking, burning fire crackers, folk operas, etc. Then tour the old streets of Ming-and-Qing dynasty tastes and ancient quadrangles in the ancient town. At night, appreciate northern Shaanxi celebrations like the 'Nine Twist Maze' and *yangge* dances.

Day 8 Yuling - Xi'an - Hong Kong



The festivities of Chinese New Year in northern Shaanxi peak around the 15th day. During the first seven days of the lunar New Year, everyone's making new year house calls and visiting families. Do plan your jourrney earlier so that you won't miss any sights or activities.

Waist-drum & Yangge Dances

Ansai waist-drum enjoys more than 2,000 years in history. That's because northern Shaanxi has always been a place of contention - fought over by the Han people and foreigners. The drumming which stirred up emotions and helped boost morale during battle evolved into a form of entertainment in times of peace. *Yangge* dace is also referred to as Shehuo or worshipping of the land and fire gods. It's the highlight of the Lantern Festival, or Chinese Valentine's Day, on the 15th Lunar New Year day. *Yangge* dance is the general term for the performance that includes kids dressing up as historical figures on a metal stand, stilt-walking, lion dance, etc.

Photography Tips

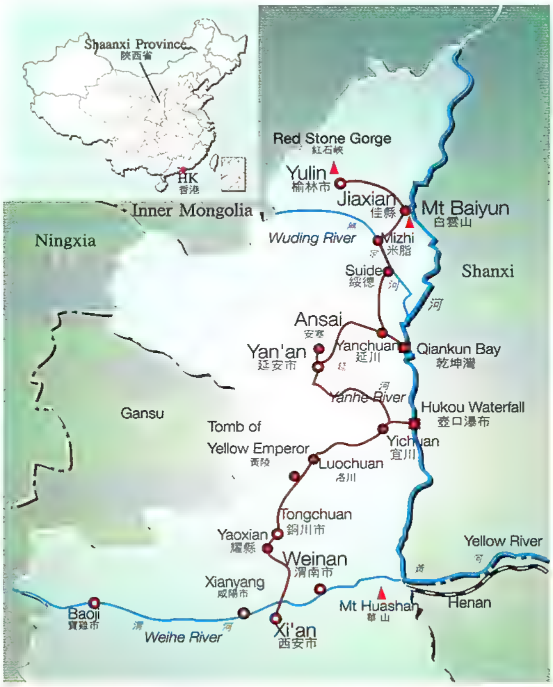
Every year Ansai County's waist-drum troupes would perform in their own villages until the 14th, but by the Lantern Festival (the 15th day of the lunar new year), they would all gather in town to take part in the *yangge* and waist-drum dance parades, this procession would wind its way through the main streets of Ansai County.

Where: Xihekou, outskirts of Ansai County, Shaanxi Province

When: Around the 14th & 15th of the lunar New Year

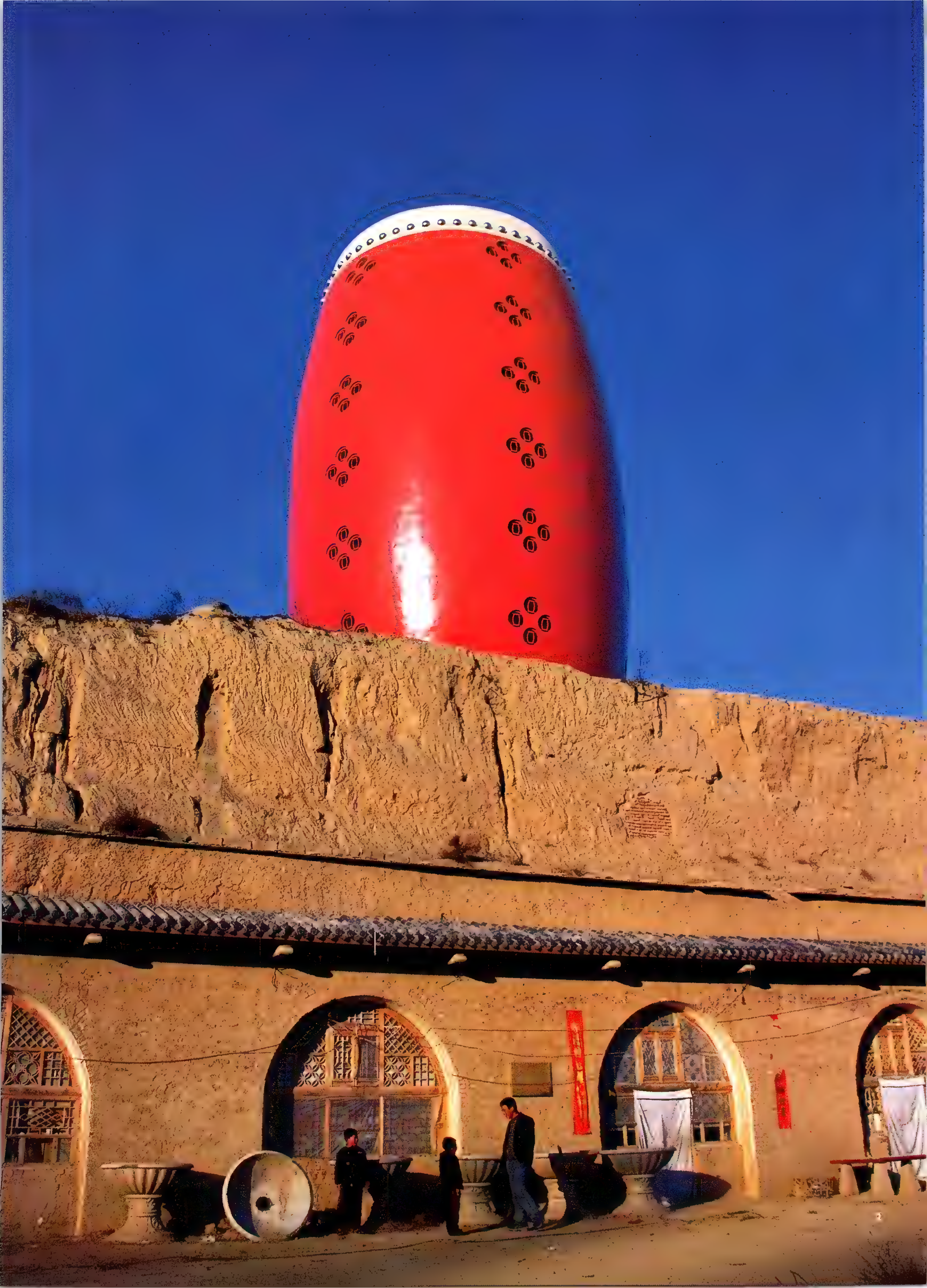
Performance fee: 50 yuan/ person/ 30 minutes (you can hire your own waist-drum performing troupe, a 20-person team costs around 1,000 yuan)

Accommodation: Ansai Hotel 120 yuan/ room



1. To the stirring rhythms of drumming, the drummers - heads bound with white scarves and waists strapped with red drums emerge, raising waves of sand on the yellow soil, their powerful and spirited dancing embodies the courage, honesty and strength of northern Shaanxi people. (by Ma Yiu Chun)

2. The 'Best Drum Under Heaven'. (by Ma Yiu Chun)



1. *Yangge* dancing during Chinese new year is a happy treat for children. (by Ma Yiu Chun)

2. Hukou Waterfall in winter is an icy wonderland, the surrounding cliffs are hung with ice stalactites, everyone walks ultra carefully to avoid slipping. (by Stephen Or)

Hukou Waterfall

Hukou (Kettle Spout) Waterfall is in between Shaanxi's Yichuan and Shanxi's Jixian, the raging Yellow River flows here, the waterway narrows suddenly from 200 ~ 300 metres about 40 ~ 50 metres wide, causing it to cascade dramatically for 30 metres - the crashing water sounds like thunder and galloping horses. It is especially spectacular in winter, turning into a silvery ice curtain, with cliffs all around hung with icy stalactites.

Photography Tips

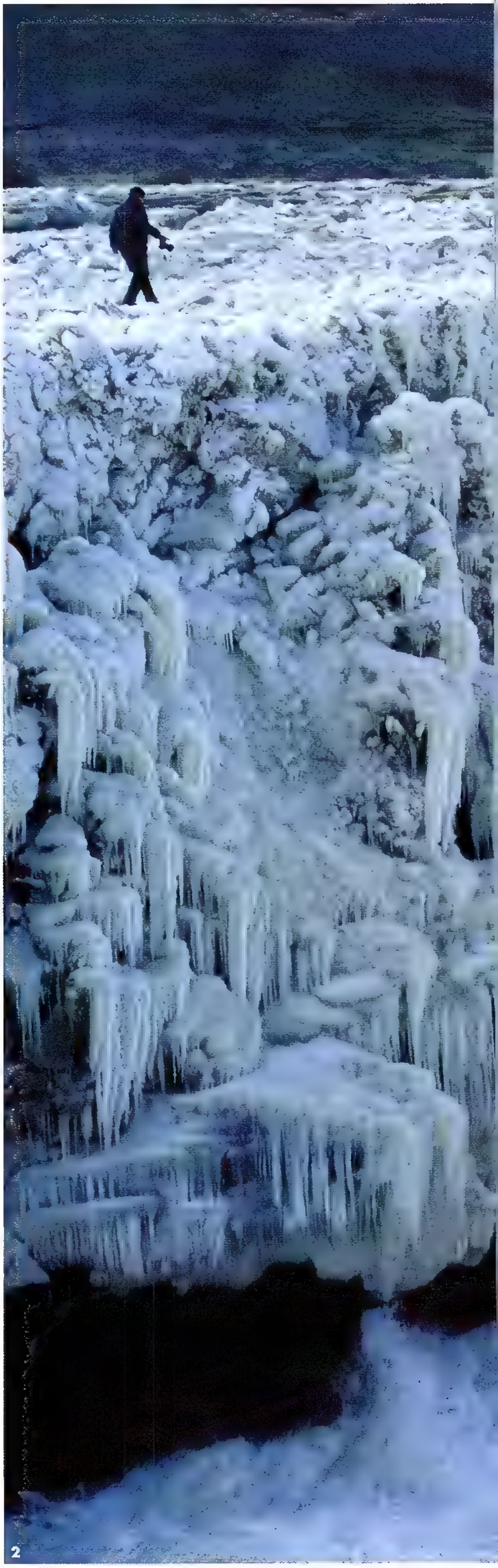
Because the sun sets early in winter, it's best to shoot Hukou waterfall in the mornings, the ice curtain is tinged light blue before the sun rises, then when the first rays hit the frozen falls - it's a different spectacle again. Take special care around the Hukou waterfall in winter because the ice is very slippery, it's no fun falling into the Yellow River at temperatures below zero!

Accommodation: There are star-rated hotels (150 yuan/ room) and ordinary hotels (60 yuan/ room) both in Shaanxi and Shanxi provinces.

Transport: Take a bus from Xi'an to Yichuan County, then transfer to a minibus to Hukou. Alternatively, take a provincial shuttle bus towards Linfen in Shanxi and get off at Hukou.

Photography Equipment Tips 1

Temperatures in northern Shaanxi are usually below zero in spring and winter, mechanical cameras are better at withstanding the cold; while digital cameras would need a back-up of batteries or external power sources, alternatively stick on a heat-pad to keep the batteries going in the cold. In terms of lenses, wide-angle lenses below 24 mm are good for shots of the sprawling Loess Plateau or to portray the carnival-like atmosphere of major celebrations. For a mid focal length lens, 24 mm ~ 70 mm (or 28 mm ~ 70 mm) will suit your needs in the colourful new year celebrations, use the 80 ~ 200 mm zoom lens for snapping portraits during festivities like the *yangge* dance.



Families in Cave Dwellings

Yan'an is a sacred ground of the communist revolution that led to the founding of modern China, the first generation of the New China leaders had all spent long periods of time living in the cave dwellings of Yan'an. You may also stay with a local family, enjoying a genuine country feast in the caves.

Photography Tips

To really experience Chinese New Year in northern Shaanxi, one has to stay at a cave. Yan'an has many cave hotels, but the best choice is to stay with local families and see what the real cave dwellings look like, with their courtyards full of crops, stone grind, stone mills and other farming tools. In February or March you may also witness their preparations for welcoming the Chinese New Year, such as paper-cutting, sticking up new year couplets, preparing the new year feast, etc.

1. Though Yanhe (a stream of the Yellow River) is often dry, according to tradition people must shower and change into new clothes to welcome the New Year. So people living in the cave dwellings in Yan'an must collect water no matter how long the journey will take. (by Stephen Or)

2. The best part of spending the Chinese New Year in northern Shaanxi would have to be staying with farming families in their cave dwellings. (by Shan Xiaogang)

3. A passionate Suide men is playing the suona trumpets. (by Ma Yiu Chun)

4. The Northern Shaanxi girls have a sultry beauty all their own. (by Ma Yiu Chun)

Accommodation
Yan'an Hotel (911) 211 3122
150 ~ 250 yuan/ room
Yan'an Travel Building (911) 213 8666
560 yuan/ room
Yaodong Hotel (911) 221 9503
168 yuan/ room
Add: Beipo, Hougou, Yangjialing Village,
Qiaogou Town, Baota District

Fair Maidens and Handsome Men

Northern Shaanxi has always been a border stronghold, the centuries of racial integration has meant subtle changes to the looks of its people. Straight noses, dark eyebrows, deep-set eyes, the people here are attractive. The most well known are the women of Mizhi and men of Suide.Lots of well-known Chinese historical figures were originated from this area. Lu Bu, a talented young general as mentioned in Romance of the Three Kingdoms, was born in Suide; Diao Chan, one of the ancient Four Beauties of China, was born in Mizhi. In fact, Lu Bu had also been attracted by her.

Photography Tips

During the rest of the year these beauties and the handsome men are working away from home, they only come back for Chinese New Year, hence this is the best time to photograph them. At this time of the year, the farmers of northern Shaanxi have a rare time off, it's also when marriages and celebrations take place. Don't miss out to shoot the wedding ceremonies. Another good opportunity to capture the women of Mizhi and men of Suide is at the yangge dance performances.

Accommodation: Mizhi Hotel 100 yuan/ room

Photography Equipment Tips 2

Film-wise, your main choices are ISO100 (outdoors) and ISO400 (interiors), with some black and white films for highland landscapes. Kodak's 100vs is great for capturing the textures of the yellow soil, while Fuji RDP suits portraits. Be mindful of the windy conditions of northern Shaanxi in winter and spring, because the sand carried by the wind can easily damage your lenses and camera CCD. Put your gear inside your bag as soon as you're done shooting, don't leave it exposed for long periods of time, because even on windless days, northern Shaanxi is a very dusty place, especially when the waist-drum performances start, then the dust really flies.

Smart Tips for the Traveller

Clothing:

Northern Shaanxi has a plateau continental monsoon climate, with dry and windy springs and winters, the annual average temperature is 10°C. The temperature can vary greatly between morning and night, winters are very cold, with the mercury stuck at around -10°C. When spending Chinese New Year in northern Shaanxi, you'll need down jackets, scarves, gloves, and earmuffs and masks are wise choices to ward against the biting wind.

Food:

Remember that during Chinese New Year (from the first to 5th days), most local restaurants will be closed, you can either eat at the hotel or better yet, head for a farmer family. Northern Shaanxi cuisine is heavy on grain-based staples, but during the Chinese New Year most families would kill chickens and lambs for special meals. You'd be able to taste seasonal delicacies like lamb offal, lamb noodles, colourful steamed bread, yellow rice cake. But stay away from a diet too heavy on fish and meat. Northern Shaanxi is part of the loess highlands and very dry, drink lots of water and eat as much fruit as you can.

Transportation:

To get to northern Shaanxi, you can first fly to Xi'an. Hong Kong to Xi'an direct flights cost around 2,100 yuan, flights from Shenzhen or Guangzhou cost around 1,600 yuan, the flights are approximately two and a half hours, there are several daily services from all three cities.

Xi'an is about 600 km away from Yan'an, you can choose between a 5-hour train ride, 6 ~ 7 hours on the bus or a 50-minute flight. For the budget conscious, consider taking the slower night flight to Yan'an, because you leave at night and arrive in the morning, you can save on one night's accommodation.

Xi'an - Yulin Flights (daily, 1 hour 10 minutes)

Northern Shaanxi Local Transport: there are buses between towns, but the services may stop for the Chinese New Year period (from the 1st to 5th days), it's best to find out before you go. Also remember that days are short in the winters of northern Shaanxi, return buses are virtually impossible after 5 p.m. Self-driving in northern Shaanxi for Chinese new year is a flexible and convenient option, or you can hire a car from Yan'an to various towns - VW Santanas (around 400 yuan/ day), minivans (around 300 yuan/ day), expect a slightly higher price during Chinese New Year.

Accommodation:

Xi'an, Yan'an, Hukou are popular tourist spots, with hotels above three stars. Their townships would have government run inns or hotels, with simpler facilities but reasonable hygiene standards. These hotels are usually in the centre of town, ask locals for directions. Winter is the off-season for tourism in northern Shaanxi, one can usually find hotel rooms going for around 120 yuan, inns and family guesthouses cost between 30 ~ 80. A stay at a cave hotel is highly recommended to see what it's like to live in a cave and sleep on the fire-heated beds.

1. Jiaxian's Xianglu Temple sits suspended on the west bank of the Yellow River, as if some magical edifice that's appeared out of thin air. (by Stephen Or)

2. Donkeys are an indispensable form of transport here at the loess highlands. (by Shi Baoxiu)

3. Downstream near Wuding River's inlet to the Yellow River is the famous Qiankun Bend. (by Shi Baoxiu)

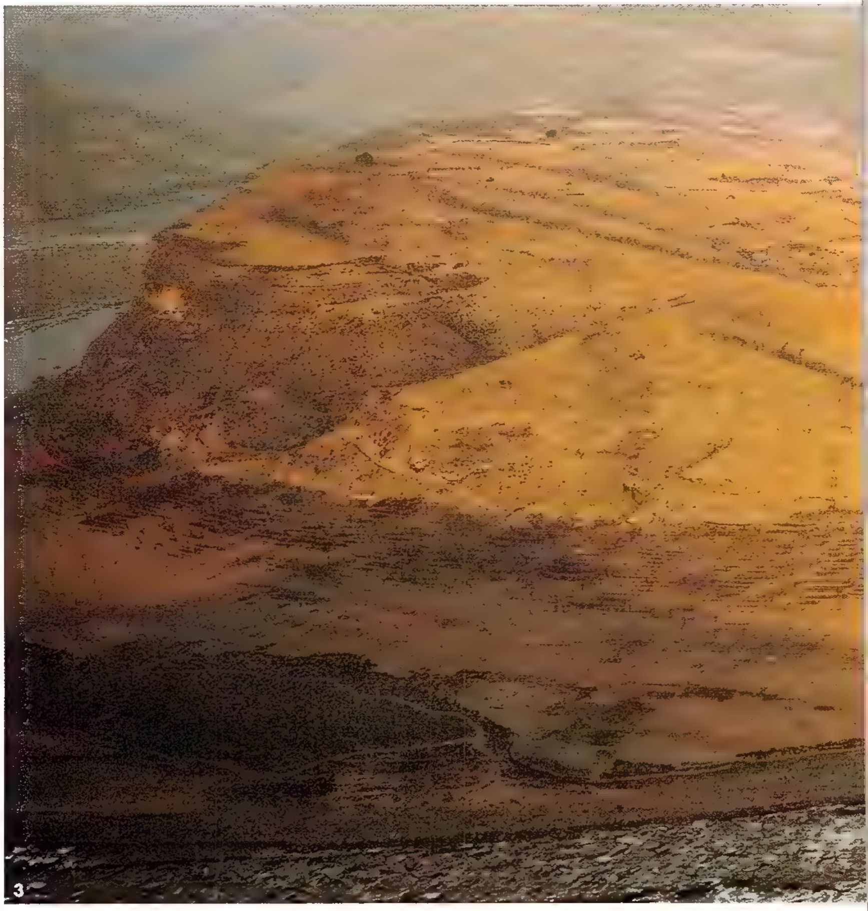
Loess Plateau

Xianglu (Incense Burner) Temple was built in the Ming Dynasty. The view from the temple is breathtaking - a bird's eye view of the entire Yellow River. You'll be able to count each of the nine twists in the mighty Yellow River and Shaanxi-Shanxi Great Canyon.

Photography Tips

You'll produce better pictures shooting from higher vantage points or good lookouts. Try to use the favourable light conditions in the morning and evening to accentuate every ridge and gully of the magnificent Loess Plateau.

Accommodation: Jiaxian Hotel 80 yuan/ room



3

Yellow River Bend

Qiankun Bend is situated between Yanchuan (Shaanxi Province) and Yonghe (Shanxi Province). It is the best known of the five bends that the Yellow River makes within Yanchuan. Each of the S-shaped bends cradles a peninsula-like village, on the east is Hehuili Village of Yonghe County, to the west is Fuyi Village of Yanchuan County, forming a perfect Taichi symbol of the yin and yang fish, the villages are located exactly where the fish eyes are on the symbol.

Photography Tips

To do Qiankun Bend justice, you need a super wide-angle lens, ideally with 16 mm focal length to take in the entire Bend, in addition, using wide format cameras may give your pictures more visual oomph. In my personal view, Yellow River in winter makes for more interesting pictures than in summer. Snow scenes are even better because the white snow adds some visual interest to the loess highlands. Try to use the warm tones at dusk combined with the frozen river for images of maximum impact.

Transport: Yanchuan is around 80 km or two hours from Yan'an, from there you can hire a car (VW Santana's cost around 200 yuan per day, Beijing Jeep 2020S cost 160 yuan per day), pass Sunjiayuan, Tugang Liujiashan to Xiaocheng.

Accommodation: Qiankun Bend Resort

120 yuan/ room

Special thanks to China Artistic Photography Society

Enjoying a Tibetan New Year

Photos & Articlen • Liao Qin

This Lunar New Year's Day is 18 February and it happens to be the same day in the Tibetan Calendar. If you are fed up with saying or hearing 'Kung Hei Fat Choi' (Wish You Good Fortune) which sounds too money-grubbing, why not make a change and greet others with a Tibetan way instead?

Early December in the Tibetan Calendar

- Soaking Qingke seeds

Every household begins to soak *qingke* (a barley which grows on Qinghai-Tibet Plateau) seeds in a basin. On the Tibetan New Year Day, the seedlings will grow to one or two inches tall (6). They are put on the side table of the Buddhist niche to wish for good harvests and luck.

Mid-December in the Tibetan Calendar

- Frying fruit seeds and New Year shopping

Every household prepares butter and white noodles, and fries *kasai* (fruit seeds) (3,8). There is a great variety of fruit seeds. Barkor Street is a major New Year shopping market. There are stalls selling *qiema* (decorated wooden wheat boxes), *qingke*, red or green painted wheat ear (2) and butter flower (5). Colourful New Year decorations (7) are also available here. In addition, shoppers should also buy exorcising stuffs and ingredients for *Gutu* — the New Year's Eve dinner.

28th & 29th of December in the Tibetan Calendar

- Spring-cleaning

In these two days, every household have to thoroughly clean up their garden, replace the rugs inside the house and post New Year paintings. Before New Year's Eve Dinner, in the villages around Lhasa people have to write the words 'Ba Ji Xiang Hui' (八吉祥徽) with *zanba* (roasted *qingke* barley flour) on the middle wall in the kitchen. The villagers would also use lime, white paint and *zanba* to draw a 'cross' or pictures of the sun and the moon which symbolize good luck and eternity. Some households would also paint many white dots on the house beams which represent fertility and good harvesting (4).

In the evening, every household puts lots of *kasai* on their tables and have *Gutu*. People like to play planks on other by adding little white stones, wool, or chilli into the food. When someone 'eat' such stuffs, everyone would laugh loudly and this would add more joy to the festive occasion.

Every household prepares some wood for making *qiema* which symbolizes good harvest and weather. There are decorative patterns of wheat box on the outside of *qiema*. Half of the space inside the wooden box is for keeping *qingke* and the other half for *zanba* noodies. A grain ear is inserted to the top of the wooden box with a few little pieces of butter (4).

Some households would also use butter to make a sculpture of goat head and in Tibetan it is called 'Long Guo'. On this night, many people would light firecrackers and the sounds of firecrackers would echo in the whole city.

Tibetan New Year's Day

- Carrying lucky water and eating lucky rice

Following the tradition, in the morning, people gets up, go to the river and carry the first bucket of water which is regarded as lucky water. Then the whole family put on new clothes. All members take a seat in order of seniority and eat some rice made of ginseng fruit, butter and sugar, known as lucky rice. After the meal, seniors take out a bowl of five cereals and all family members grasp some grains from it. Then they throw them into the sky as offerings to the gods and put some into their own mouths. At this moment, the elders would say 'Zha Xi De Le' (扎西德勒) to the young ones and the latter would wish the former good health and eternal happiness. Then drink some 'Guan Dian' which is made by mixing *qingke* liquor and *qingke* flour paste. The soup also contains some ginseng fruit and milk dregs. Next would be drinking liquour or tea and saying cheers to each other. Traditionally, Tibetans would stay home on New Year's Day but nowadays they would visit their neighbours and relatives with *qiema* and green wheat liquour.

2nd ~ 7th of New Year Month

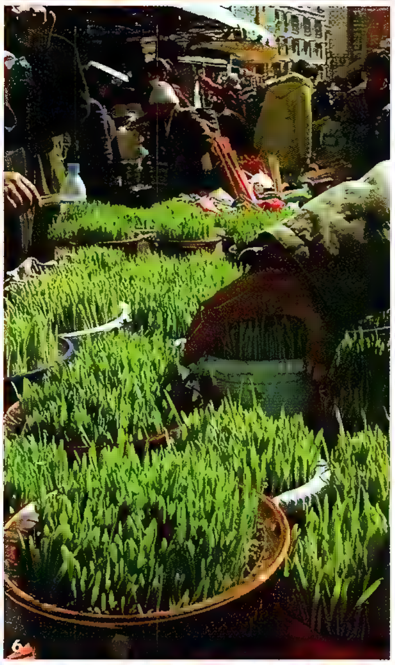
- Visiting friends and relatives

Guests once enters the house and said 'Zha Xi De Le'. The host immediately says 'the same to you' to the guests and let them go inside and sit on the new rug. He serves them with *qiema*. Guests take turns to pick up some noodles, throw them into the air and pray to the gods of the sky and the earth. Afterwards, they put some into their mouths. Then the host takes out a pot, bowls and serves the guests with the wheat liquour with a smile. As a gesture of respect, the guests must finish one bowl of liquour in three mouthfuls. If a guest cannot finish drinking it, the host would invite the others to sing and cheer the guest up. The guest must finish the remaining liqour in the bowl in one time.

The third day is a time for hoisting prayer flags. The residents of Lhasa climb up their house roof and replace the prayer flags. Then they gather in groups, go to Baoping (Precious Bottle) Mountain on the eastern countryside and Yaowang (Medicine King) Mountain on the western countryside and make their offerings to the gods of mountain and water (1).

During the New Year period, on squares or large pastures, men in colourful Tibetan gowns and women dressed in their best will stand in circles and start to dance. Against the music of six-string instruments, cymbals and gongs, men and women are gleefully dancing and singing hand in hand while kids are lighting firecrackers with joy. Also, from the 4th to 25th, there will be grand Tibetan Buddhist prayers festivals.

Translated by Ezekiel Pang



Tibetan Incense

Photos & Article · Yu Qiong

Tibetan incense is used by Tibetans to show piety and also in Tibetan medicine. In Tibet, the making of incense is mainly done by Tibetan medical doctors. Located in the Shannan region, Mindroling Monastery is the main seat of Nyingmapa, the oldest and original school of Tibetan Buddhism, founded by Padmasambhava himself. The monastery has an ancient Tibetan incense workshop. The remnants of the murals on the walls and the grasses and trees in the courtyard speak of the origins of and changes to Tibetan incense over the centuries.

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Mindroling Monastery

We drove at dusk on the highway along the Yarlung Zangbo River (Brahmaputra) to Zhanang County, heading for Mindroling (also known as Minzholing) Monastery. Yougecang Longrijiangcuo (Mandarin spelling), a member of our party, is a Tibetan incense expert. Situated in the southeast, 100 km from Lhasa, the monastery is in Tabaling Village, Zhaqi Township, Zhanang County. As the main seat of Nyingmapa, the monastery is the sacred place of origin of the Tibetan 10-discipline system of knowledge. This ancient institution of higher learning in Tibet also plays an important part in preserving Tibetan medical heritage. The versatile Master Rigdzin Gyurme Dorje (Terdak Lingpa) (1646—1714), founder of the monastery, was known far and wide for his dharmic attainment and for making several medical discoveries. The Fifth Dalai Lama (1617—1682) and his prince regent, Diba Sanggyai Gyaco, formally acknowledged him as *guru*, or teacher. He oversaw completion of the construction of Mindroling Monastery in 1677.

A few green trees before the monastery's main gate created a mottled pattern of shade and light on the crimson door. Two lamas stood at the gate, as if they had been expecting us. The Chair of the Monastery Administration Committee, Tenzin, was off to Lhasa for a meeting, and so the pair gladly showed us around the monastery. The incense workshop was inside the old sutra hall. All the monastery's other buildings were empty. Our expert Longri Jiangcuo plucked a handful of a grass from the ground and gave it to me. 'This grass is called Gandan camphene. It is said that Master Tsongkhapa, founder of the Gelukpa, spread his hair around Gandan Monastery, after which this scented grass grew. It is one of the main ingredients of Tibetan incense.' He pointed at a tree behind me, saying, 'The bark of this tree is also a main ingredient. It is sticky and in the past we used it as soap. In Chinese books it is called "elm".'

Modern machinery has taken the place of manual labour in the workshop, saving time and energy, but also diminishing the delicacy and purity of the fragrance.

Three Types of Incense

The Tibetan incense of Mindroling Monastery has much to do with the monastery's Tibetan medicine heritage. The founder of the monastery, Dharma King Terdak Lingpa, combined many rare Tibetan herbs and scented grasses, as well as sandalwood and other substances from India, to create the monastery's valuable, signature Tibetan incense. In the past the Tibetan incense made here was supplied exclusively to Potala Palace and the Tibetan central government. In the 1980s, production of Tibetan incense was restored and modernized. The main ingredients now are saffron, sandalwood and elm bark.

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The Tibetan incense made in Nyemo County in southwest Lhasa is also famous. Each household in Tunba Village follows the tradition of making Tibetan incense. Scented brick, a main ingredient in local Tibetan incense, is equally well known. In Nyemo, people use the watermill to grind cypress trunks into a thick substance, which they form into rectangular bricks — the famous scented bricks. The area's watermills have also become a local attraction. The Tibetan incense making tradition in Nyemo has lasted for years. As the locals cannot afford expensive Tibetan herbs, their particular incense contains only three or four ingredients. Nyemo incense is sold, without packaging, for low prices to nearby villagers. A small fraction of the incense is sold to Lhasa. Although Nyemo Tibetan incense has sold well in the past couple of years, it is of a low grade.

Minzhumeiba Tibetan incense was initially made by Longri Jiangcuo according to recipe books handed down by the family at Mindroling Monastery. He has collected a large number of folk formulas for Tibetan incense. The main ingredients of Tibetan incense, such as sandalwood, saffron, cloves, elm bark and nutmeg, are herbal, shrub or tree substances. Eighty percent of the ingredients are produced on the Tibet-Qinghai Plateau, while 20 percent are imported from India. Longri Jiangcuo said that, for environment protection purpose, he bought the remaining red sandalwood pieces left from rosary making. The composition of the sandalwood pieces was exactly the same. Except for the raw materials, other techniques had to be hand-made.Some of the special herbs are still ground by hand today.

Longri Jiangcuo

Longri Jiangcuo (Mandarin spelling) was born into the famous Yougecang family of Amdo. One of his

1. Quality Tibetan incense purifies the air, raises immunity, and relaxes body and mind.

2. Master Terdak Lingpa as he appears on ancient murals painted by his younger brother, Lochen Dharmashri. During the Cultural Revolution, the murals were badly damaged. After religious freedom was restored, someone mischievously painted a pair of glasses with turquoise lenses on the master's face. The repaired image looks quite modern.

3. Newly built main hall and sutra hall of Mindroling Monastery.

4. Tracing the history of Tibetan incense.

1. Longri Jiangcuo collected information about Tibetan incense from the locals.

2. Elm bark works as an adhesive in Tibetan incense.

3. Fragrant Gandan camphene grass is said to have started growing after Master Tsongkhapa spread his hair around Gandan Monastery. It is an important ingredient in Tibetan incense.

4. Making Tibetan incense.

5. Herbs used to make Tibetan incense.

ancestors had a karmic 'fragrant' encounter with the founder of Mindroling Monastery, Master Terdak Lingpa. The Yougecang family enjoyed power and prestige in the region for many generations and acquired an ancient sutra of Tibetan incense related to Terdak Lingpa. The sutra recorded the techniques and formulas for making incense. When Longri Jiangcuo's great-grandfather was young, he studied Tibetan medicine in Lhasa. Longri Jiangcuo's grandfather also had a great deal of Tibetan medical knowledge, including knowing how to make Tibetan incense. Longri Jiangcuo grew up watching his grandfather collect various scented herbs from the local mountains and process them into Tibetan incense. As a result, Longri Jiangcuo had a special interest in Tibetan incense. His father, a famous orthopaedist, often treats locals for free. At 17, Longri Jiangcuo left home to work in Lhasa. With the opening of the Zhangmu Customs house on the China-Nepal border, he turned to exporting goods to Nepal. While in Nepal, he took the opportunity to visit incense plants in India and there he learned the techniques for making incense. He thought someday he might combine what he had learned with his grandfather's techniques and revive Tibetan incense making.

Developing Tradition

A homesick Buddhist, Longri Jiangcuo eventually returned to Lhasa, transferring all of his investments back to Tibet. After settling back in, he embarked on his dream of restoring and developing Tibetan incense making techniques.Longri Jiangcuo said, 'The traditional Tibetan culture has a lot of quintessential elements, for example, Tibetan incense. The ancestors made use of the scented herbs on the Qinghai-Tibet Plateau to produce Tibetan incense for therapeutic purpose. Good Tibetan incense is specially effective in curing flu and freshening the air'.

Five years ago, he began looking into the origins of Tibetan incense, Mindroling Monastery and Tunba Village in Nyemo County. With the help of locals and much experimentation, he succeeded in making his own Minzhumeiba Tibetan incense. Many an ancient Tibetan incense formula was acquired through various channels from the locals. To thank them for their help, he hired skilled incense makers from the poorer families of Tunba Village and the rural areas to work at his plant.

Tibet's Own Perfume

Minzhumeiba has now produced the first-ever bottle of Tibetan perfume. The main ingredients are extracted from sandalwood and combined with other

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ingredients, including scented herbs. Longri Jiangcuo's idea for creating a perfume came from two years spent in Saudi Arabia in the early 90s. Arab countries have long used spices for many various purposes. The city where Longri Jiangcuo lived had the largest perfume market in the world. The perfumes, extracted from scented herbs, were free of chemicals. Longri Jiangcuo felt that since the Qinghai-Tibet Plateau had its own treasury of scented herbs and medicinal substances, there was no reason why Tibet could not have its own particular perfume, too. He then seized every chance to visit perfume plants, accumulating an in-depth knowledge of the techniques, processes and technologies used in perfume making.

'Water-soaked resin', an ingredient used in traditional Tibetan medicine, shares some common properties with perfume. With no appropriate

1. Incense burning is a way of life in Tibet. At dawn we met this woman carrying a weisang burner into the fields to work.

2. The weisang tradition is practiced at dawn and dusk atop the sutra hall.

3. The monastery's Tibetan incense workshop.

4. Tibetan incense makes a good souvenir.

5. The Minzhumeiba Tibetan Incense Specialty Store in Lhasa.

6. Incense sachets.

7. Tibet's first packaged scent — Minzhumeiba perfume.

facilities in Tibet, Longri Jiangcuo shipped the raw materials for his singular Tibetan scent to the country's largest perfume factory in Shenzhen. He experimented with his formula and in September 2005 he created Tibet's first perfume. By 22 August, 2006, it was on the market.

Longri Jiangcuo has a huge container filled with lake water collected from the sacred mountains and lakes by friends and relatives who have gone there on pilgrimage. He adds the sacred water to the perfume and the Tibetan incense his company makes according to the Tibetan faith. When the perfume and incense are ready, he invites lamas to chant sutra and hold 'aiding and dedication' ceremonies in Jokhang Temple. His incense and perfume are uniquely Tibetan, with a little extra help from the gods.

In the past, Tibetan incense linked our world to Heaven. The Tibetan incense of the future will link Tibet to the rest of the world.

Translated by Zhang Boli

Travel Tips for Mindroling Monastery

Transportation

1. Two buses run directly to Mindroling Monastery at Nima Lakang (Sun Hall) in north Lingkhor Street in Lhasa. The fare is 25 yuan, and the trip takes 2 hours.
2. Take a Lhasa-Zêtang bus and get off at the intersection where a road branches off to Mindroling Monastery, 8 km away. Farming and herding make up much of the southern Tibet scenery.

Accommodation

Mindroling Monastery has a hostel, but facilities are basic. The rate is 15 yuan/bed.

The newer Zhuzhou Hotel is in the Zhanang County seat, 10 km away. The rate is 20 ~ 30 yuan/bed, and a standard room with private shower and colour TV is 160 yuan.

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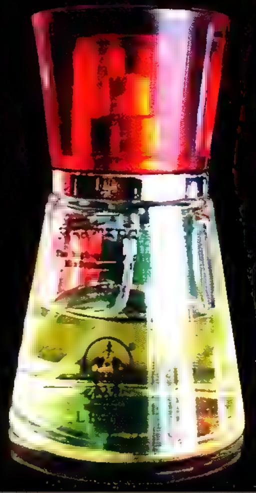

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Choosing Tibetan Incense

1. The outer surface of a Tibetan incense stick should be even and not dyed. No powder should drop from the stick when held or stick to the fingers. The stick should be slim and straight.
2. When burned, it should give off a light, elegant and enduring fragrance. It should not be pungent or irritate the eyes or nose. The fragrance is penetrating and lingering.
3. Good incense is made from ground natural substances, including herbs, spices, plants and minerals, and is free of chemicals, making it therapeutic and healthful.

Minzhumeiba Tibetan incense:

Minzhumeiba, one of the three top brands of Tibetan incense, comes in 56 varieties. The best-quality perfume and Tibetan incense gift packs range from 120 to 270 yuan per box, while the medium-quality packs range from 28 to 45 yuan per box. Common Tibetan incense is priced at 4 to 10 yuan per pack. The perfume comes in four fragrances, priced from 120 to 130 yuan per bottle. Incense sachets cost 20 to 35 yuan.

Speciality store in Lhasa: 8 Zhangyiyuan Road, Lhasa (at the northwest corner of Jokhang Temple Square, diagonally opposite the Xiangbala Hotel)
Tel: (891) 653 0066

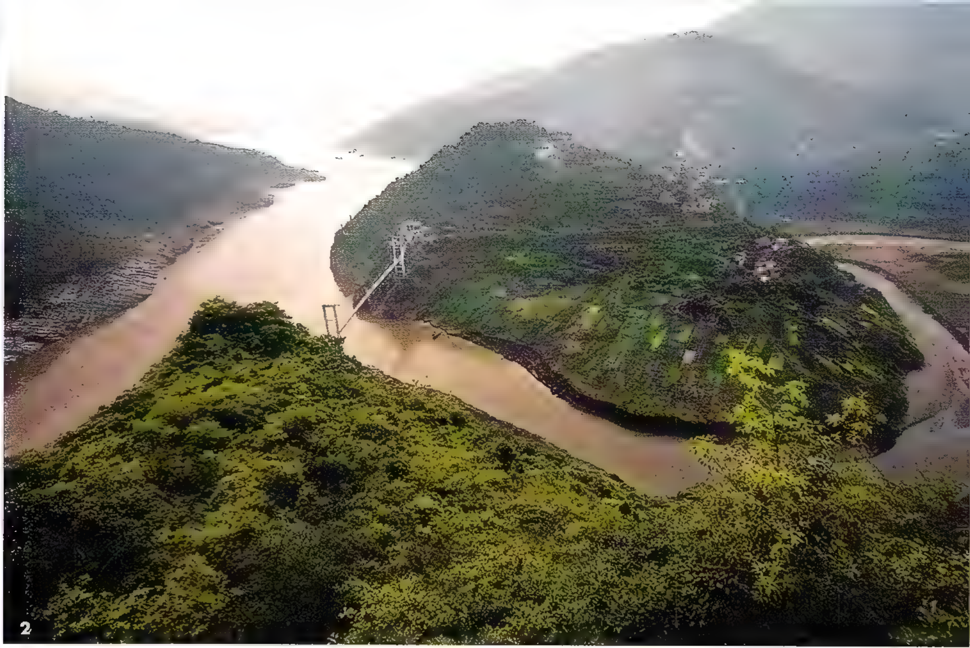
Revisiting the Three Gorges

Photos · Zheng Yunfeng Article · Zheng Yunfeng, Su Bo

Editor's note: As of 10 p.m. on 20 September, 2006, the water level of the Yangtze River Three Gorges Reservoir began to rise from the 135-metre level towards the 156-metre mark. The river widened while the mountain peaks on either side of the river shortened, resulting in significant changes to the area's scenery yet again...

Zheng Yunfeng, a correspondent of *China Tourism*, has followed with interest the changes in the landscape of the Three Gorges for years. After this latest rise in the water level in October 2006, he visited the Three Gorges Reservoir again and recorded the new landscape that awaited him.

1. Baidi Town, photographed from Chijia Hill on the north side of Qutang Gorge on 23 October, 2006. After the Three Gorges Reservoir was completed, the water level in the river now reaches 156 metres, turning Baidi Town into an isolated islet.



2. Baidi Town, April 1999.

At 3 p.m. on 26 October, 2006, I arrived by train at Yichang city at the eastern end of the Three Gorges on the Yangtze River. I immediately took a taxi for the Jiumatou Dock and bought a boat ticket for Fengjie. The boat, called 'Three Gorges Ark', was scheduled to leave at 9 p.m. and I looked forward to stretching out on my bed on board.

It turned out that since 12 September, 2006, passengers travelling upstream would have to cross the Three Gorges Dam by bus before getting on the boat at Maoping Port. On the other hand, passengers travelling downriver had to disembark at Maoping Port and then go to downtown Yichang by bus. This state of affairs will last for a year until the completion of all projects relating to the five-tier double-lined dam lock. During this period only 20 tourist boats are authorized to directly pass through the lock. All the other 38 tourist boats operating in the Gorges region as well as 42 passenger ships run by 14 shipping companies in Chongqing and Hubei have to be anchored at Maoping Port upstream of the dam site.

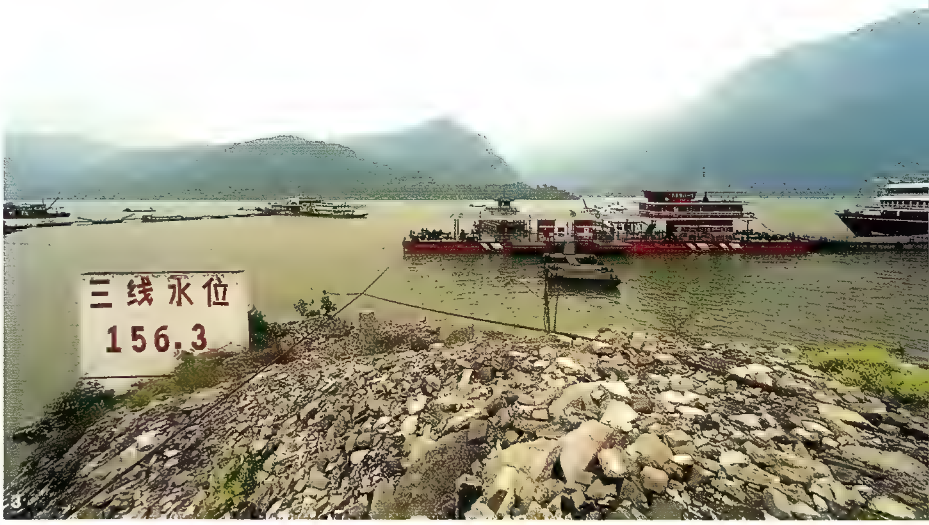
Actually taking the bus to Maoping saves much time compared with a journey by boat since the latter takes hours to pass through the Gezhou Dam lock and Three Gorges Dam lock. But on the other hand, it means that passengers will miss seeing the Gezhou Dam, the eastern part of the Xiling Gorge and the Three Gorges Dam.

With a loud and long wail of the siren, the Three Gorges Ark left Maoping Port dock and sailed into Xiling Gorge.

The boat went forward steadily this time — a totally different experience from the night sailing through the Three Gorges many years ago. Back then when the boat passed through the narrow Xiling Gorge accompanied by strong wind and choppy water, it often jolted along on the water.

A New Islet

Our boat arrived at Fengjie Port at the western end of the Three Gorges the next day at 7:30 a.m. My fellow correspondent Su Bo and I rented a fishing



3. The water level in the Three Georges Reservoir rose to 156.3 metres in the later half of October 2006.

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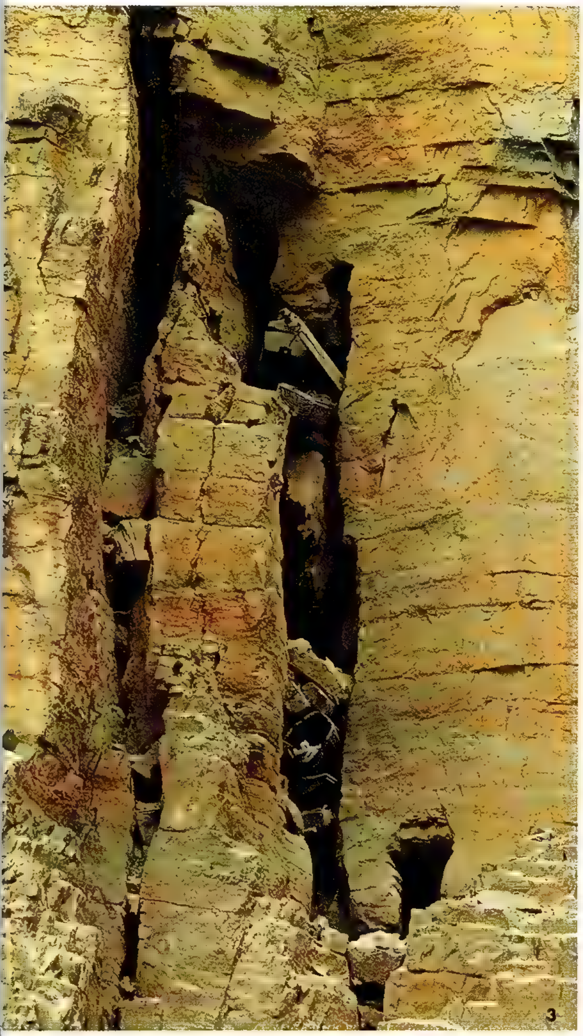
boat at the dock and left for the town of Baidi (White Emperor). The town lies at the starting point of the Qutang Gorge, first of the three Yangtze gorges. It used to be 160 metres above the river and surrounded by water on three sides. Such a location made it a place of strategic importance in history.

Now the site looks like a large opened green umbrella floating on a vast expanse of water. The only land route linking Baidi Town and downtown area of Fengjie has been submerged. As a cement bridge joining the two is still under construction, tourists have to take boats authorized by the local tourism authorities to reach Baidi Town. The water surface is now half way up the Chijia (Red Shell) Hill, submerging most of the 800 steps from the mountain foot to the Baidi Temple. After anchoring the fishing boat below the Chijia Tower, Su and I immediately climbed up the Chijia Hill. Standing atop and looking down at Baidi Town, we saw that the ancient town seemed to be floating in a large lake formed after the Caotang River joined the Yangtze.

Compared to before the flooding, the river had widened and the Chijia and Baiyan (White Salt) hills appeared lower. Many sights — the breathtaking ancient pathway built along the face of the cliff, the mysterious wind-whispering gorge, the secluded Phoenix Spring — were all gone under the water. But the massive cliffs of stone on both banks of the Kuimen Gate remained perpendicular and towering. In the meantime, a new group of sights came into view. Now we can draw close to the cliffs to see and even touch the ancient Meng Liang Ti cliff-side road. Cliff engravings, which were removed from their underwater locations and relocated here, are also near at hand. In addition, we can see clearly the hanging coffins of the ancient Ba ethnic minority (originated from eastern part of Sichuan Province and



Chongqing) placed in cliff crevices along the north bank.

Relocation of 3,000 Macaques

The water surface at the mouth of Wuxia Gorge and Daning River now has an expanse of some 10 sq km. It joins the Rainbow Bridge over the Wuxia Gorge, the Lesser Three Gorges and some even smaller gorges on the Daning (Great Peace) River to form a magnificent landscape.

I took a tourist boat to visit the Lesser Three Gorges. On the way we went through the Longmen and Bawu gorges before reaching the Chibi (Red Cliff) Motian Scenic Area by the Dicui Gorge. We made quick time on the long and narrow river course. In less than 10 minutes we were out of the Longmen Gorge into increasingly wider waters.

After passing the Shuanglong (Double Dragons) Town, our boat sailed into the 20-kilometre-long Dicui Gorge and Golden Monkey Peak came into my vision. On sunny days, crowds of macaques can be seen playing on the mountain. More than 3,000 macaques lived in this area however the rising water forced many of them to flee. To encourage the macaques to take up residence here, the administration staff used corn and rice to guide the monkeys to a safer place for resettlement. In addition, 30 forest rangers served as guides and used red flags, scarecrows, shouting and firecrackers to force the stray monkeys to follow the right direction.

Ancient Town Becomes a Lake

After touring the Lesser Three Gorges, I got off the tourist boat at the Madu (Horse Ferry) River mouth and took a small motor-driven boat upstream to reach the ancient town of Dachang. Dachang was situated in a broad and flat valley on the upper reaches of the Daning River. It used to be surrounded by fertile farmlands with abundant crops. When I last visited, the town had two major streets: one was 150 metres long from north to south; and the other 240 metres from east to west. Its area totalled some 10 hectares, and it was the best-preserved ancient town in the Gorges area.

After we had left the east opening of Dicui Gorge, the waters become broader and after a few more

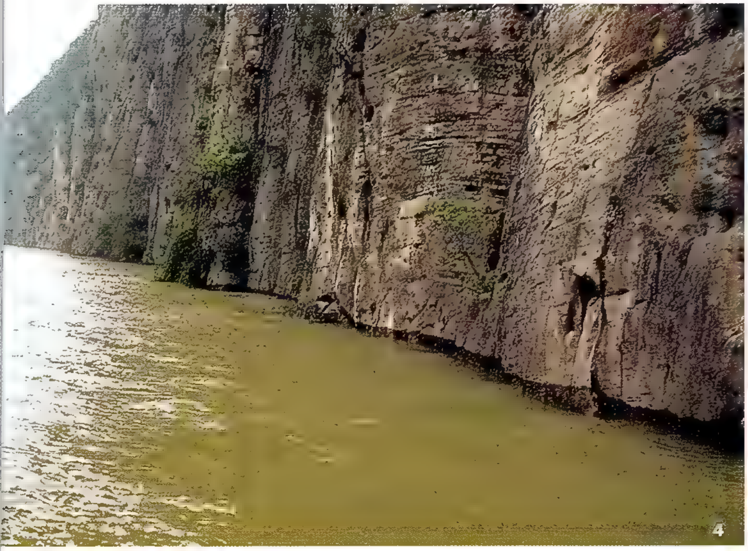
1. Pipa Islet on 26 October, 2006. Located in the broad valley between Longmen and Bawu gorges on the Daning River, it is now under water.

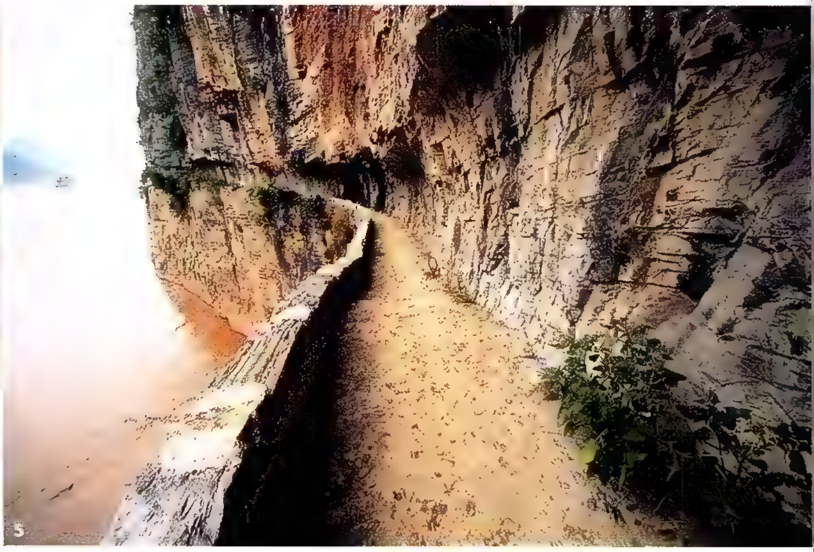
2. Pipa Islet, May 1997.

3. Now visitors can clearly see the unique hanging wooden coffins hidden in the rock cervices.

4. The ancient plank road at Qutang Gorge was totally submerged on October 23, 2006.

5. The Qutang Gorge ancient plank road in June 1999.





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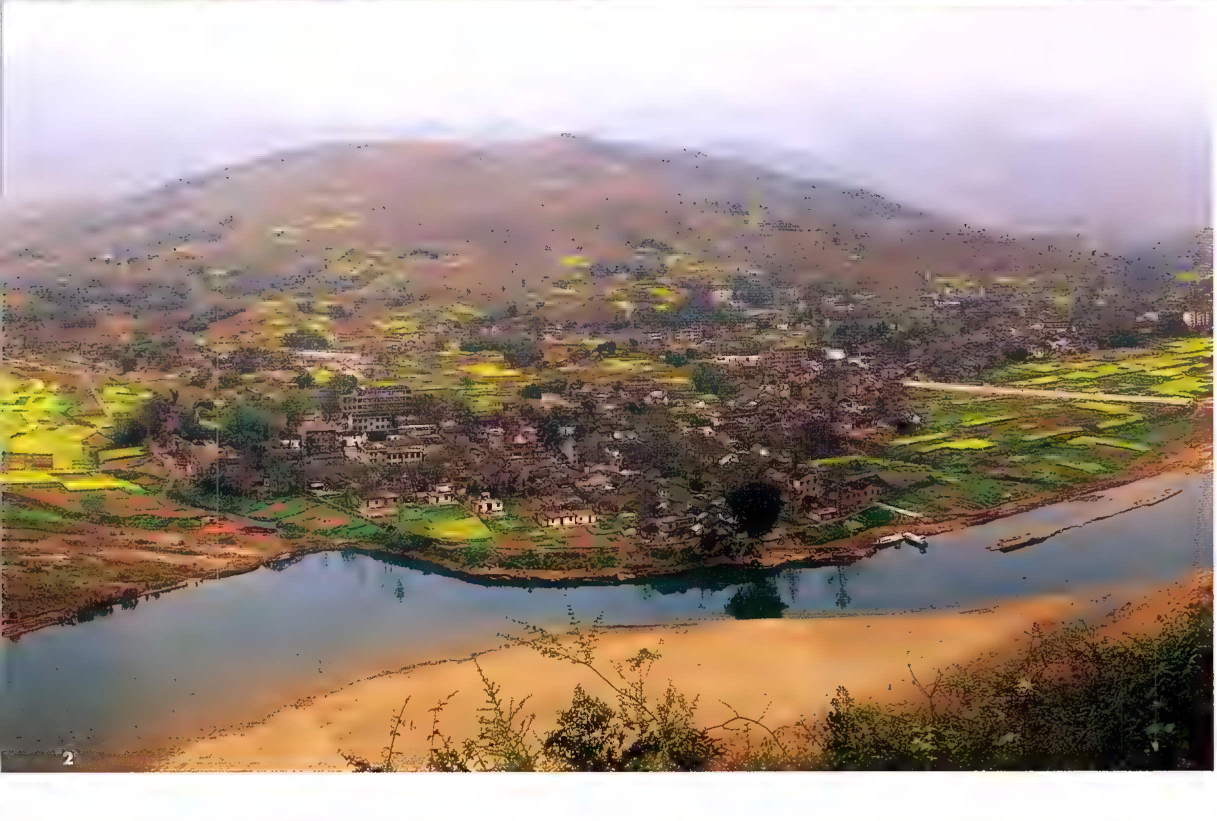

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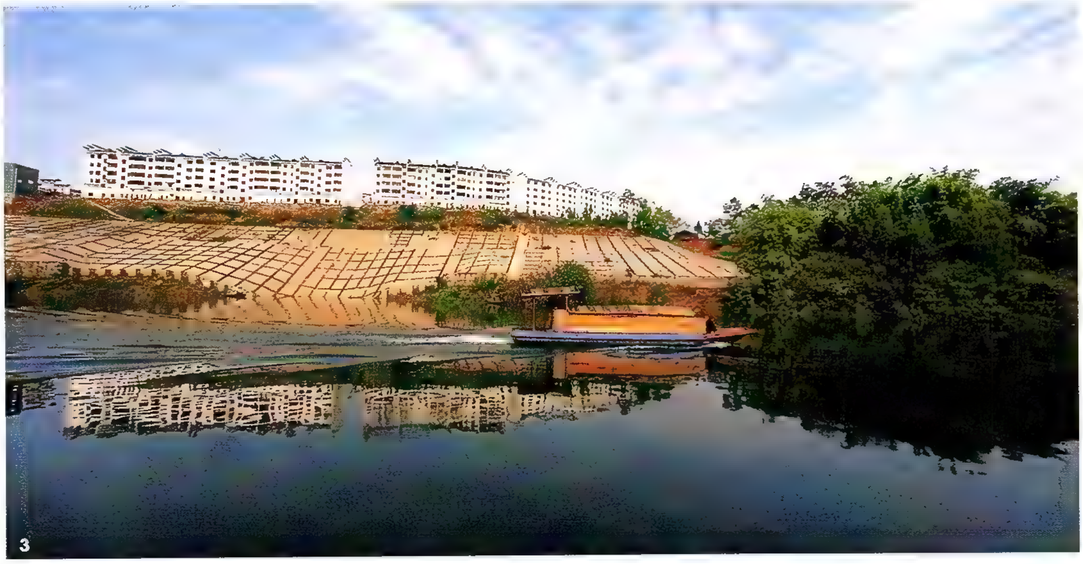
1. Dachang was once a place of strategic military importance, and is the only well preserved ancient town in the Three Gorges area. With the rise of water level to 156 metres, the town disappeared under water. The photo was taken on 26 October, 2006.

2. A full view of Dachang shot in March 2004.



3. The Dachang new town is 6 km downstream from the old one. As large-scale road and house construction may destablise the dykes and cause new landslides, the priority task facing the local government during the construction of the new town is to prevent landslides and strengthen the dyke walls.

4. The Lesser Three Gorges on the Daning River are now accessible to large tourist boats.

turns, in the distance rows of new buildings came into sight. Captain Liu told me that's the new town of Dachang. I immediately photographed these new and strange scenes. In the autumn of 2002, I paid a three-day visit to Dachang before the water rose, recording with my camera all the streets, houses and other scenes of the ancient town. Those photos are now historical documents. At that time, I never imagined that Dachang would become a lake as it is today.

After taking a few more panoramas of the new town, I went ashore to photograph the new streets and buildings. The new town was modelled on the ancient town but of course incorporates some elements of modern architectures. The restoration project of the ancient town, as an integral part of the new town construction, is now under way and is being funded with an investment of 30 million yuan from the state. It is expected to be completed by the end of 2006 and open to the public on 1 May, 2007. By then a brand new town of classic elegance will unfold itself for tourist eyes.

Spectacular Shennu Stream

From a fellow photographer friend in Wushan County, I learned that Shennu (Fairy) Stream was still a place of spectacular scenery even after the water level rose. Deciding to see it in person, I rented a fishing boat and left for the stream. Within an hour, the boat arrived at the foot of the Shennu Peak. The 'fairy' seems to be much closer to us now compared with what she was in the past.

The boat took a turn to the foot of the Feifeng (Flying Phoenix) Peak and into the Shennu Stream before arriving at the scenic area administrative bureau. After hearing what I had come for, the staff arranged a special small wooden boat which carried us further along the stream.

The stream certainly measures up to its fame - water flows gently in its narrow course and towering crags rising from both sides are covered with green vines. There are numerous water pools of varying sizes. The pebbles at the bottom of pools are covered with moss. I indulged myself so much in this picturesque scenery that I forget to take pictures for a moment. The stream got increasingly shallow. Later we had to push the boat forward until we were exhausted. Leaving the boat, we continued our way along a shortcut between the steep cliffs.

A New Look for Shennong Stream

The next morning at 9 a.m. we took the 'Yangtze' hydrofoil at the Wushan dock for Shennong (Divine Dragon) Stream in Badong County. Two hours later, we arrived at Badong dock via the ancient town of Zigui where the memorial hall to Qu Yuan, a great patriotic poet and politician born during the Warring States Period (475—221 B.C.), is located and the ancient town of Xiangxi.

Shennong Stream is 60 km long. In the past it was full of twists and turns and had sharp drops. The boat bottom would rub against the pebbles at shallow

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1. The old county seat of Wushan was completely levelled to the ground. This photo was taken on 25 October, 2006.

2. The photo taken in July 2000 shows the county seat of Wushan before it was dismantled. On the right side is the Yangtze while on the left side the Daning River flows to join the Yangtze.

3. A night view of the new county seat of Wushan built half way up the mountain. Wushan will launch a new tourist product — night tours of the new Gorges.

4. The Longmen canyon photographed on 27 October, 2006. The riverside house on the right used to stand on a high hillock.

5. This photo was taken from the same location in August 1999. At that time, the house on the right corner is high above the river.

shoals, as if sailing on land; while in rapids it would shoot along like an arrow released from a bowstring. But today, the water in the Longchang, Yingwu and Mianzhu gorges has become deeper and wider. Travellers no longer need to take the old sampans — instead they now can tour the stream by large environment-friendly passenger boat.

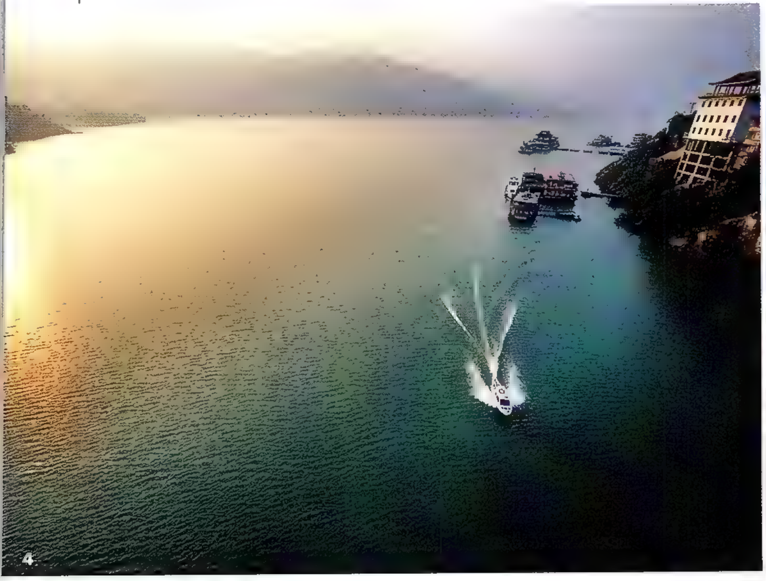
At noon we took the 'Longchang' passenger boat along the Shennong Stream and called at a limestone cave called 'Swallow Cave'. The cave is 80 metres high and 30 metres wide. Thousands of Himalayan Swiftlet birds nest in the cave and use the sky of the gorges as their exercise ground, bringing travellers delight and pleasure. Inside the cave there is also a magnificent scene of lava sediments formed in the pattern of vast stretches of farmland crisscrossed with dykes. In the past, it was difficult to reach the cave as it was high above the ground. But now the water has risen closer to the cave. It would be an unforgettable

Three Water Levels: 135, 156 and 175 metres

When the water rises to the 135-metre level, it marks the completion of the 2nd phase Dam project and the beginning of the power generation.

When the water rises to 156 metres level, the water conservancy project begins operation to help control flooding, power generation and shipping. At this level, the priority of the project will shift from construction to operational management.

175 metres marks the completion of the entire project and indicates the beginning of its normal operation period. The projected highest water level for the project is 175 metres.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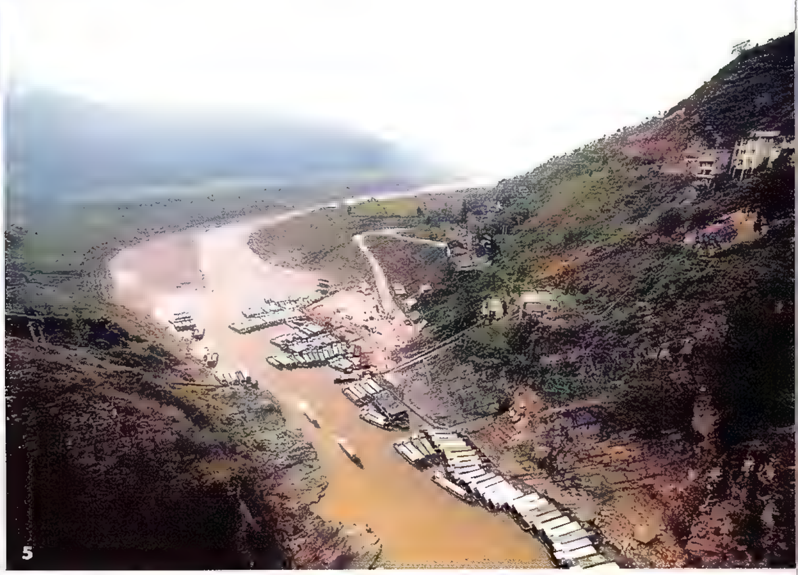
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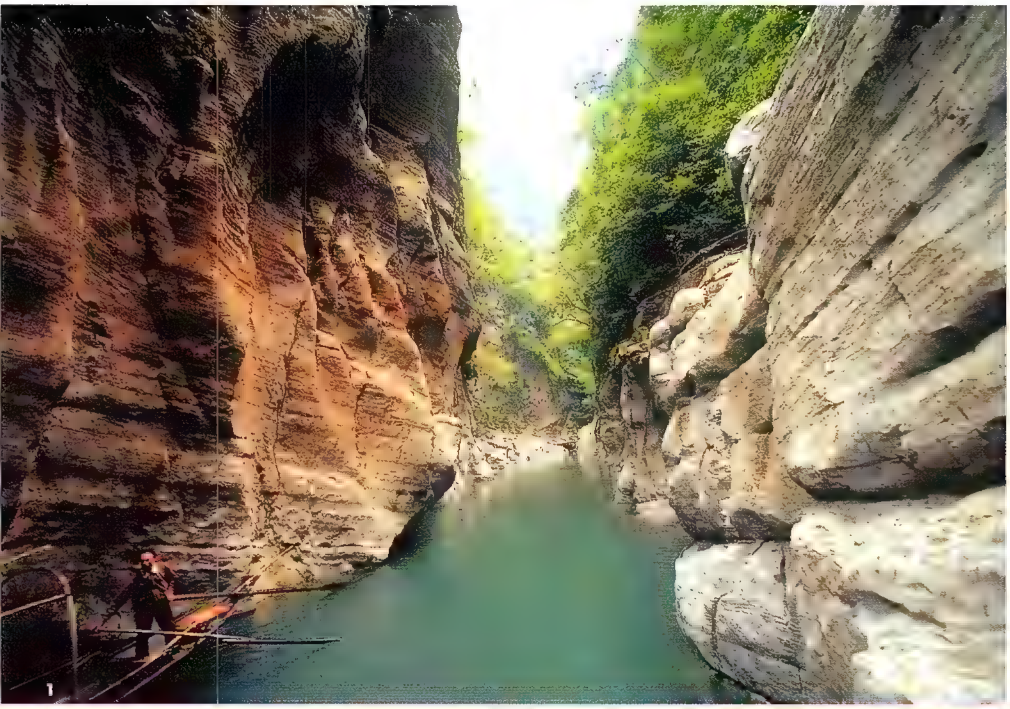
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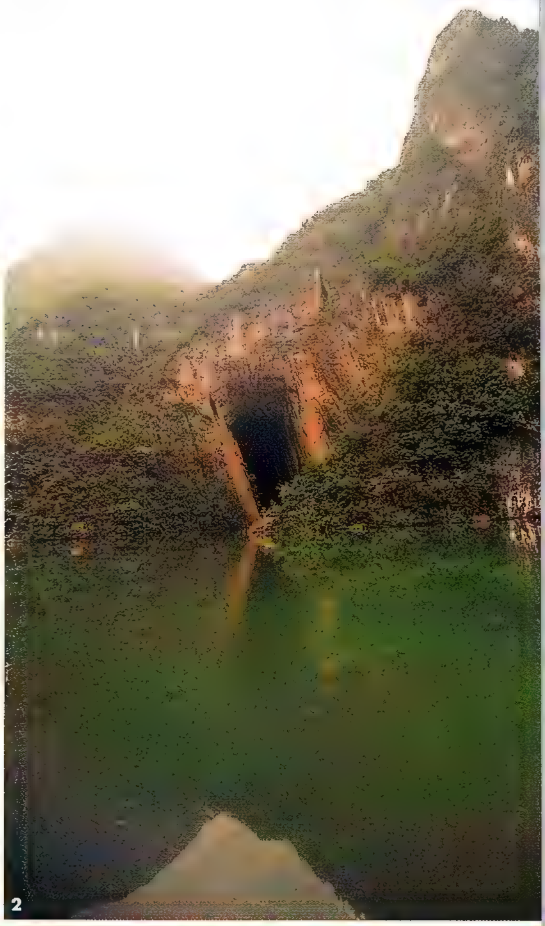
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Travel Tips

Text • Su Bo

To Yichang:

By air: There are flight between Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou, Chongqing, Chengdu and Yichang.

By train: Yichang —Guangzhou

2176: departs at 10:57, arrives in Guangzhou at 10:15 the next day

2288: departs at 19:02, arrives in Guangzhou at 10:23 the next day

By water:

Speedboat: Yichang — Wanzhou; stops on the way: Badong, Wushan, and Fengjie

Departure time: 6:10, 7:30, 8:30, 9:30, 11:00, 12:00

Steamer: Yichang — Fengjie (stops: Badong, Wushan)

Departure time: 10:30, 16:00, 18:00, 19:00

Accommodation:

Railway Hotel

Add: 80 metres left to the exit of the railway station

Standard twin-bed room: 120 ~ 160 yuan/ day

(Close to downtown area, easy to buy train tickets)

Sunshine Hotel

Add: 1 Yunji Road

(Opposite to the railway station, in a shopping area)

Pinghu Hotel

Add: 53 Dongshan Avenue

(In downtown area with ready transportation facilities)

Standard room: 360 yuan/ day; a 20% discount in the off season.

Notes: Within a year from 12 September, 2006, upriver boat passengers have to take a shuttle bus from the Yichang Port to the Maoping Port via the dam to get aboard (with the boat ticket); downstream boat passengers disembark at Maoping Port and then take the shuttle bus to downtown Yichang.

Transportation in Fengjie:

Group tourists taking boat to the Baotaping dock, Fengjie, will be carried to the Baidi Town by smaller tourist boats arranged by travel agencies. Individual tourists may also disembark at this dock and then contact travel agencies for taking smaller boat to tour the Baidi Town. Admission to Baidi Town: 60 yuan/ person. Any tourists who want to tour the Qutang Gorge may rent a fishing boat at a price of 150 yuan/ day (the price is negotiable, the lowest could be 80 yuan/ day). But local regulations ban the fishing boats from being rented out to visitors.

Accommodation:

My suggestion: Kuimen Hotel by the Baotaping dock. It's easy to take a boat.

Standard twin-bed room: 150 ~ 180 yuan

Downstream boats: As of 8 a.m. every day, several speed boats and ordinary passenger boats depart from or pass the dock.

Transportation at Wushan:

From Wushan to the Lesser Three Gorges:

For group tourists, both the upriver and downriver boats must stop at Wushan Port. They will transfer to special environmental-friendly sightseeing boats to tour the Lesser Three Gorges. Admission: 120 yuan/ person. Individual tourists have to buy 150 yuan/ person admission ticket at the dock and then contact the dock staff responsible for tourism affairs in order to join the group tourists to the destination.

Departing time of boats running between Wushan and Fengjie:

Speedboat: 7:10, 9:30, 10:40, 11:40, 12:40, 13:40, 14:40, 17:00

Steamer: 12:00, 13:00, 17:00, 20:00, 23:00

Departing time of boats running between Wushan and Badong:

Speedboat: 9:20, 10:30, 11:30, 13:00, 14:30, 15:30, 16:00

Information on steamers is available only at the dock.

The 'Qianlong' boat, named after the Qing Emperor Qianlong, boasts a huge dragon head.

trip if we could row a small boat closer to visit the cave.

Our boat made about a dozen stops on the way for the convenience of local residents and two hours later we reached our destination — the ancient town of Yanduhe. The surrounding areas of the ancient town were flooded now. We rented a small wooden boat to take pictures of the town. At 4 p.m., we were aboard a passenger ship back to the Badong Port, concluding our trip in the new Three Gorges area.

This visit to the Gorges region and the changes I have witnessed there have left me with much material for reflection. To me, the changes in many ways are a matter of regret, but on the other hand there is hope and expectation. I need to adjust my aesthetic perspectives, and the old tourist paths through the Three Gorges will change too. But I will never forget the old Three Gorges, product of human civilisation carved over millennia.

Translated by Chen Qiuping

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1. The 156m water level makes boat traffic possible in the Shennu Stream. In the picture is a gorge section 100 metres before the Seven Girls' Pool. At a high elevation, it has not been affected by rising water.

2. The Swallow Cave by Shennong Stream is home to thousands of Himalayan Swiftlet birds. When the water level reaches 175 metres two to three years later, it will be half underwater. Will these birds move to other places? (28 October, 2006)

3. Yaokui Pagoda, also called Wenfeng Pagoda, on the hillock east to the ancient town of Fengjie was built in the Qing Dynasty and is a symbol of Fengjie. Today, it's much closer to the river than its designers could ever have imagined.

Accommodation in Wushan:

Wushan State Guest Hotel

Add: 239 Pinghu Road, Wushan County

Tel: (23) 5768 8588/ (23) 5769 9994

Standard-twin: 160 ~ 180 yuan/ day

Business suite: 480 yuan/ day

All rooms are provided with wideband Internet access.

Xinhe Hotel

Add: 430 Pinghu Road, Wushan County

Standard twin-bed room: 80 ~ 100 yuan/ day

Twin suite: 120 ~ 160 yuan/ day

Yusui Hotel

Add: 180 Pinghu Road, Wushan County

Tel: (23) 5769 0988

Standard twin-bed room: 80 ~ 100 yuan/ day

All the three hotels are not far away from the dock, taking some 10 minutes by car. It costs only 10 yuan by taxi. Many small restaurants of different flavours as well as Internet cafes and recreational places are available nearby.

Transportation at Badong:

With the water rising to 156 metres, the Shennong Stream has a new look. Tourist boats or regular passenger boats service are available at Badong to take tourists to the Yanduhe town on the upper reaches of the Shennong Stream.

Badong — Yanduhe Departure time: 8:30, 12:00, 16:00

Yanduhe — Badong Departure time: 7:00, 11:00, 16:00

It is a two-hour voyage either way between Badong and Yanduhe. Boat rate: 15 yuan.

Regular speedboat service from Badong to Wushan and Fengjie: 8:10, 9:40, 10:40, 11:40, 13:10, 14:10, 16:10

Ticket booth at Wushan Port

Regular speedboat service from Badong to Maoping (further to Yichang): 8:00, 10:00, 11:00, 12:00, 14:00, 16:00, 17:00. Rates: 102 yuan for Yichang, 92 yuan for Maoping and Taipingxi, 97 yuan for Fengjie, 62 yuan for Wushan.

Accommodation at Badong:

Badong Insurance Hotel

Add: Yanjiang Road (about 10 minutes, walk from the Badong Port)

Tel: (718) 433 0648

Standard rate: 120 ~ 150 yuan (floating according to different tourist seasons)

The hotel rooms are big, clean and well equipped.

Chutian Hotel

Add: 18 Chutian Road, Badong County

Standard rate: 160 yuan/ day (including free breakfast, Internet access).

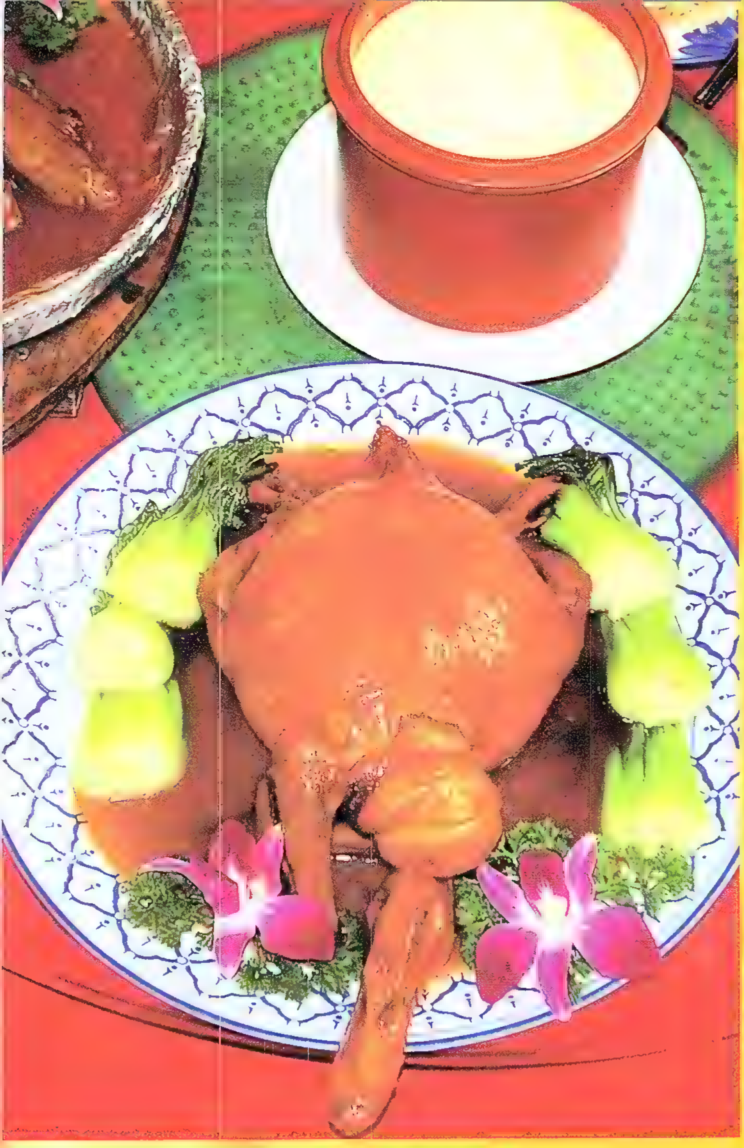
Jinyuan Building Hotel

Add: 17 Chutian Road

Tel: (718) 433 4418

Standard room: 100 ~ 200 yuan/ day

Deluxe room: 200 yuan/ day, big and spacious, and having Internet access.



Panyu Food Glorious Food,

Morning to Midnight

Photos & Article • Stephen Or

Today, any good gourmand in Guangdong knows that 'the best food is in Guangzhou, but the best taste is in Panyu'. In fact, Panyu has been synonymous with good food for centuries. Were you to spend a day there, you could feast from morn to night — on everything from the country-style cooking of ancestral hall banquets or exquisitely decadent private-home cuisine to a mouth-watering plethora of sweets and pastries.

08:00 - 09:00

BREAKFAST Breakfast at Shawan

In the old days you could get your fill of authentic Cantonese dim sum at Shawan's Guannan Lou and Fugui Lou, establishments on a par with the famous Tao Tao Ju in the provincial capital Guangzhou that drew foodies from other villages and even Shunde for the food. But to find a genuine traditional Cantonese teahouse for tea and dim sum in Shawan these days, your best chance is to visit the eateries and bakeries around Laojie (Old Street).

A breakfast stall on Shawan Old Street

Where's the best Cantonese Dim Sum?

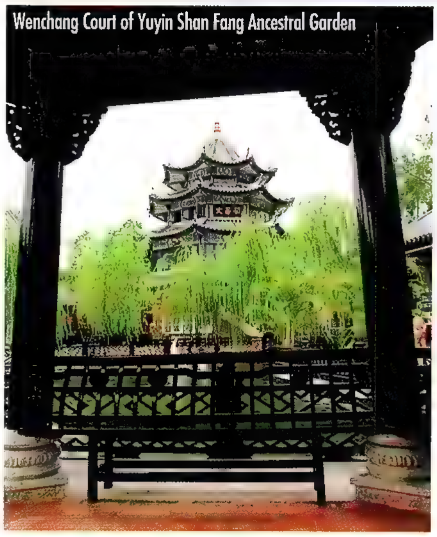
There is a small eatery that serves up a hearty breakfast at Liugeng Tang (留耕堂), in the direction of Chengfang Lane (尋芳里). Don't miss the congee, a hit with many locals. Another place to go is the entrance of Anning East Street (安寧東街). It's known for Cantonese breakfast staples like rice noodle rolls, congee, pig's offal rice noodles and glutinous rice dumplings. Everything is super fresh, but flavours may be too subtle for some palates. Other snack and dim sum vendors can be found around Laojie (Old Street). Why not try them all?

Old Street in Shawan Town (Anning West Street)

Getting there: Take a bus to Panyu Shiqiao (Town Bridge), then change to special route bus No. 6, 7 or 12 to Shawan Town (3 yuan). Get off at Wenhua Zhongxin Zhan (Cultural Centre Station) and walk the 200 or so metres to Anning Xijie (West Street). A taxi from Shiqiao to West Street costs around 25 yuan.

Top picks: Fresh-boil rice congee (3 yuan), rice noodle rolls (3.5 yuan), pig's offal rice noodles (4 yuan).

The three breakfast staples: Fried dough sticks, fried glutinous rice balls, salty pancakes


Wenchang Court of Yuyin Shan Fang Ancestral Garden

13:00 - 15:00

LUNCH Ancestral Hall Feast

Ancestral halls abound in places like Shawan and Nancun towns. In these halls, villagers hold important festivities and occasions such as marriages, births and funerals, with lavish banquets where everyone eats and drinks to their hearts' content. Ancestral hall feasts have a long history. In the past, only the emperor could offer food to the gods using nine tripods, a special kind of crockery used in sacrificial offerings. Each offering must be made in complete sets, with every 'ding' matched with a 'gui' (a large serving bowl). Over time, 'nine big bowls' came to symbolize the nine-course feast held in ancestral halls. In Panyu, the nine dishes usually include steamed chicken, steamed marbled pork, braised pork, dried baby prawns fried with vermicelli, fried egg dumplings and so on. Now many Panyu restaurants have created their own versions of the ancestral hall feast, but the best place to indulge is still at a village prayer hall. During such events, the atmosphere is more festive than that of any restaurant.

Where are the best Ancestral Hall Feasts?

Ruijing Tower, Yuyin Shan Fang (餘蔭山房瑞景樓)

Add: Beidajie, Nancun Town, Panyu District, Guangzhou Tel: (20) 3311 5182

Yu Yin Ju Grogshop (餘蔭居)

Add: Banqiao Road section of Nanda Highway (next to Hengsheng Garden), Nancun Town, Panyu District, Guangzhou Tel: (20) 3482 2998, 3482 2338

Getting there: Take the No. 10 or 17 buses to Nancun Town, then hire a motorbike cab (3 yuan). Alternatively, take a cab from Panyu Shiqiao Bus Terminal for about 18 yuan.

Top picks: Lord Wu's braised pork, Wu's pigeon, stewed winter melon soup, steamed village chicken.

Lord Wu's braised pork

15:00 - 16:00

TEA Cantonese Tea and Snacks

Cantonese music originated in Panyu's Shawan. Even now there are still many 'private bands' actively playing gigs around the Shawan area. They include the Liutang Music Society at Shawan's Sannian Hall (三稔廳) and Xiaojie Lou of Nancun's Yuyin Shan Fang. Locals love to gather at both venues for tea and tunes in the afternoon. A pot of fragrant Pu'er tea with a plate of Shawan's famous milk cookies is the perfect way to pass an afternoon. Would you like something sweet? The freshly-made Panyu dessert *Jiang Mai Nai* (薑埋奶 ginger sauce mixed with milk) served at Yuyin Shan Fang is the best choice.

Meanwhile, the shop across the street from Sannian Hall serves great wontons. At the traditional bakery next-door, you'll find all kinds of Cantonese snacks and cakes, such as the lovely Golden Pig baked cakes.

Making of ginger sauce mixed with milk

Where's the best Cantonese afternoon tea?

Liutang Music Society (柳堂樂社)
Add: Within Sannian Hall, Beicun, Shawan, Panyu District, Guangzhou.

Xiaojie Lou (小姐樓) of Yuyin Shanzhuang (餘蔭山莊)
Add: Beidaijie, Nancun Town, Panyu District, Guangzhou.
Tel: (20) 3311 5182

Top picks: Milk cookies (15 yuan/box), meat dumplings wrapped in fish-meat skin (4 yuan/ bowl), Jiang Mai Nai (3.5 yuan/ bowl), Golden Pig baked cakes (3 yuan/ each).

Golden Pig baked cakes

Meat dumplings wrapped in fish-meat skin

18:00 - 20:00

DINNER A Private Rendezvous

Shawan residents are known to be extremely painstaking with their food. Can you imagine stuffing 5-mm-diameter bean sprouts with bits of shredded chicken? Shawan cuisine is known for its nutritional content, with many recipes from private homes developed to strengthen one's health or cure diseases. The dish *Wu Dai Tong Tang* (五代同堂Five Generations in One Family), for example, is a complex creation made from five layers of quail, pigeon, black chicken and village chicken. The pigeon is stuffed with quail and rare herbs, sealed, then stuffed into a black chicken... there are five layers in total as if five bags ('five bags' is pronounced as 'wu dai' 五袋 in Mandarin), which in Chinese sounds like 'five generations'. Each layer is paired with different ingredients that culminate in a superb dish that perfectly balances flavours, nutritional value and textures.

Now you don't have to be royalty to enjoy private-home cuisine in Shawan as there are restaurants that follow the traditions of the Lingnan tycoons' family recipes inherited from those grand households, such as Qin Fang Yuan. A new style has also emerged — restaurants like Rich Land Food World have fused the essence of Shawan noblemen's private-home cuisines with innovative touches.

Carp fish head cooked in milk hotpot

A wall made from oyster shells

'Five Generations in One Family' — the house dish of Rich Land Food World

Where's the best private cuisine?

Qin Fang Yuan Garden Restaurant (沁芳園園林餐廳)
Add: Qingluo Road, Shawan, Panyu District, Guangzhou.
Tel: (20) 8473 0922
Getting there: Take bus No. 6 or 12 to Shawan, then take a motorbike cab (2 yuan). Or take a taxi from Panyu Shiqiao Bus Terminus for about 25 yuan.

Top picks: Peanut and fish rice congee (15 yuan), 'Shawan pancake' (15 yuan), roasted duck stuffed with lotus seeds and minced meat (48 yuan), brewed chicken with Chinese tea (40 yuan).

Rich Land Food World (銀船灣餐廳)
Add: 60-63 Nancun Industrial Zone, Shawan, Panyu District, Panyu District, Guangzhou.
Tel: (20) 8473 8497
Getting there: Take bus No. 6B and get off at the terminal stop; or take a taxi from Panyu Shiqiao Bus Terminus for about 25 yuan.

Top picks: Wu Dai Tong Tang (128 yuan), water spinach stuffed with pork (13 yuan), 'straw chicken' (free-range chicken from nearby Qingyuan) (58 yuan).

21:00 - 22:00

DESSERT

Chasing the Honey

Shawan's desserts date back more than a hundred years. In the Qing Dynasty, the men of well-to-do households enjoyed opium. But it had the unfortunate side effect of causing constipation, which is why chefs in Shawan created hundreds of desserts to help cleanse the digestive system. Another reason is that the daughters, wives and mistresses of these Lingnan noblemen needed to sustain their energy levels for endless nights of music and poker, as well as to keep their youthful looks. Chefs were always whipping up new sweet treats; that's how the tiny town of Shawan came to be known for more than 300 types of desserts.

The signature Shawan dessert is ginger milk, which must be made at the perfect temperature with the very best ingredients. The milk must be thick and fresh and the young ginger that of the dense-sprouting variety. After the fresh milk is heated to 80°C, the pressed young ginger juice is added to create the fragrant, smooth ginger milk. If that doesn't satisfy your sweet tooth, indulge in a milk dessert banquet at Qin Fang Yuan with friends. Choose from deep-fried milk, stir-fried milk or milk and taro sweet soup. Other signature desserts include ginger milk, custard, double-skin milk, sticky rice with different fillings. There are three hundred-odd desserts to choose from in all.

Qin Fang Yuan's dessert banquet

Where's the best dessert?

Qin Fang Yuan Garden Restaurant

Add: Qingluo Road, Shawan, Panyu District, Guangzhou.

Tel: (20) 8473 0922

Getting there: Take bus No. 6 or 12. Or hire a taxi from Panyu Shiqiao Terminus for about 25 yuan.

Desserts can be enjoyed at all of Qin Fang Yuan's branches, but the milk dessert banquet is only available at the garden restaurant.

Top picks: Ginger sauce mixed with milk (3.5 yuan), milk frost sticky rice (8 yuan/ dozen).

00:00 MIDNIGHT

SNACK

Fresh Pig's Offal

When the clock strikes 12 a.m. in Panyu, locals and tourists go for a midnight snack. What could be so tempting that people would give up sleep and travel so far for it? Believe it or not, it's fresh pig's offal — a Panyu delicacy. At midnight, restaurants buy pig's offal and cook it on the spot, resulting in delicious dishes that beg to be eaten straightaway. But timing is the key: too early and it won't be ready; too late and it's no longer fresh. The Huijing Restaurant enjoys the advantage of being near the abattoir, so its pig's offal dishes are the freshest and most famous. The restaurant's specialities include 'energizing pig's liver soup' and 'pig's offal on an iron platter '. 'Energizing pig's liver soup' is made from an herbal soup base in which fresh liver is soaked. The resulting soup is as tasty as it is nutritional — great for improving the circulation and beautifying the complexion. 'Pig's offal on an iron platter' is a heavenly aromatic stew of fresh pig's liver, kidney, stomach, intestines and a secret sauce, all cooked up on an iron platter.

Translated by Cheng Lei

Pig's offal served on an iron platter

Where's the best midnight snack?

Huijing Restaurant (匯景酒家)

Add: Junction of Yushan Avenue and Xihuan Road, Panyu District, Guangzhou.

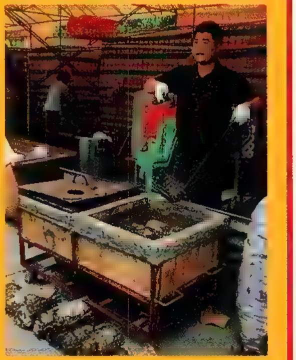
Tel: (20) 8480 7877 Wesite: www.hj8888.cn

Getting there: Take the bus No. 9 or 16. A taxi ride from Panyu Shiqiao bus terminal costs around 12 yuan.

Top picks: 'Energizing pig's liver soup' (23 yuan), 'pig's offal on an iron platter '(25 yuan), 'vanilla lamb stew' (38 yuan).

Eat Till You Drop

— Panyu Tourism Culture and Food Festival



If you're stretched for time but still want a taste of all the delicacies of Panyu, the 'Panyu Tourism Culture And Food Festival' won't disappoint. The Panyu government holds this food and fun extravaganza every year during the National Day holiday week starting from 1 October. More than 100 stalls and thousands of famous dishes give visitors a whirlwind gourmet tour around Panyu and even the world.

Add: Central Park of Panyu Square, Shiqiao, Panyu, Guangzhou.

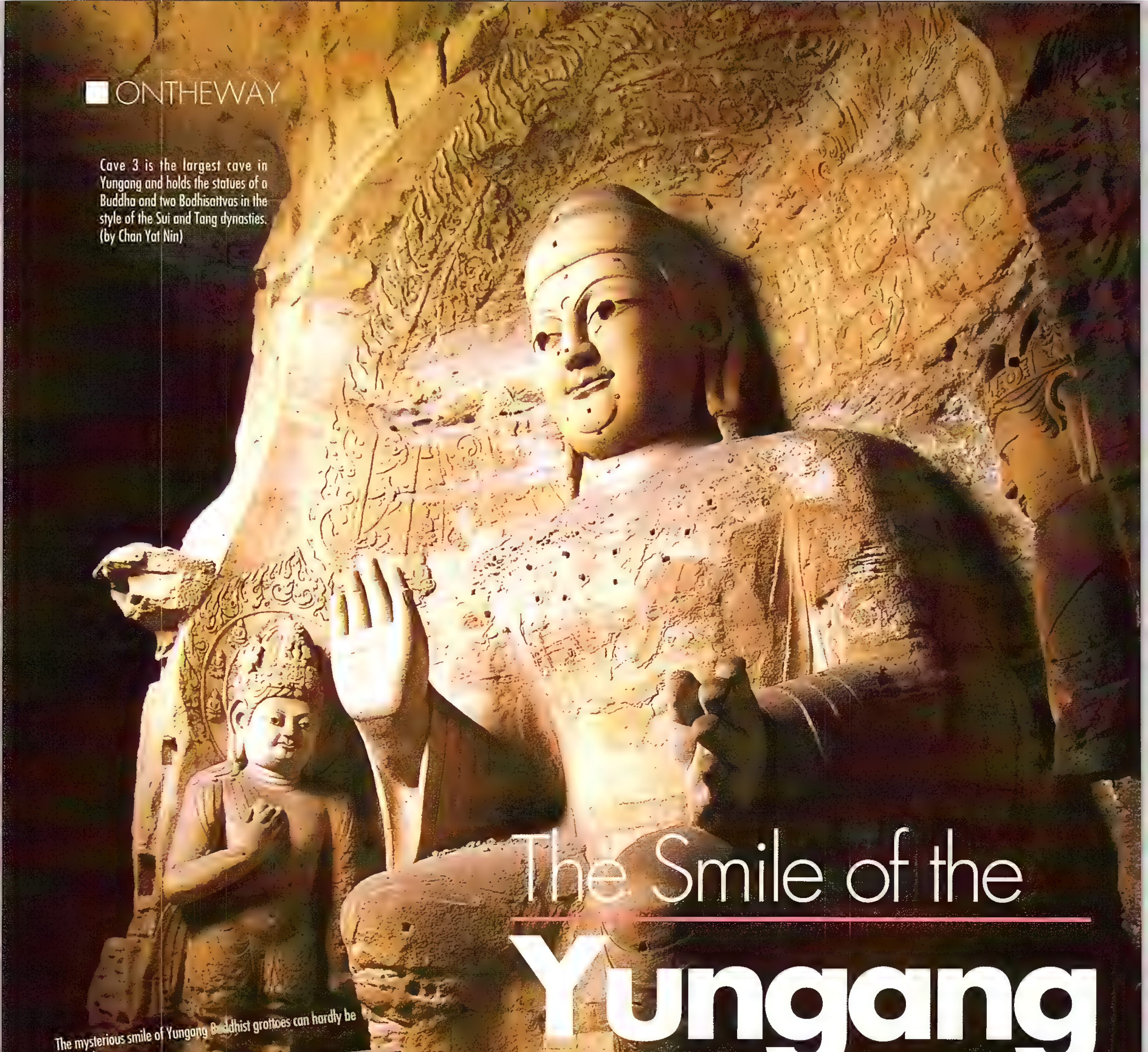
Getting there: Take bus No. 1 or 11, then get off at the district government stop. Or take a cab from Panyu Shiqiao bus terminal (around 10 yuan).

Travel Tips for Panyu

Getting there: To reach Panyu from Hong Kong, take one of the many direct buses arranged by China Travel Service, or any Guangdong-Hong Kong bus, to Panyu, Shiqiao and Clifford Estates (Qi Fu Xin Cun). Tickets cost around HK$80.

To travel from Guangzhou to Panyu, take bus No. 282 from the Guangdong Province Bus Station to Panyu Shiqiao in the town centre. The fare is 20 yuan. It's very easy to grab a taxi from Panyu Bus Terminus to Panyu Square. The fare is about 10 yuan.

Accommodation: Downtown Panyu is convenient to places like Shawan, Yuyin Shan Fang, so travellers can use Shiqiao as a starting point. Most star-rated hotels are centred in Shiqiao. While there are also some hotels and inns around Shawan, they may not be as comfortable; it is better to stay in Shiqiao.



Cave 3 is the largest cave in Yungang and holds the statues of a Buddha and two Bodhisattvas in the style of the Sui and Tang dynasties. (by Chan Yat Nin)

The mysterious smile of Yungang Buddhist grottoes can hardly be seen today.

The Smile of the Yungang Buddha

Photos & Article · Anita Yeung

When Buddhism began to spread in India in the 5th century B.C., believers didn't make statues of the Buddha, but used images of the bodhi tree, the Dharma cakra and pagodas to represent him. It was not until the 2nd century that the first artistic image of the Buddha appear in Gandhāra in northwest India, and later similar images were introduced to China via the Western Regions.

By the time the Yungang Grottoes were created by the decree of the Northern Wei Emperor Xiaowendi, Buddhist art in China was still very much in its infancy. Instead of appearing as a fantastical object from another world or boorish colourful paint on clay, the figures of the Buddha at this time were simply and elegantly designed using the original colour of rock, and featuring a mysterious smile.

Almost all books about Yungang feature the same image of the Buddha — wearing a high bun with impressive long eyebrows, downcast long eyes, a high nose, and a mysterious smile on his lips. I was stunned at my first sight of the image. Didn't such a smile appear when Sakyamuni gained enlightenment under the bodhi tree of birth, death, illness and senility? This 'Smile of Yungang' struck me with awe and left an impression in mind even stronger than the Mona Lisa.

Yungang Grottoes amidst the Soot

While browsing tourist information, I was surprised to find that the Yungang Grottoes are located 16 km from Datong, one of the most polluted cities in China.

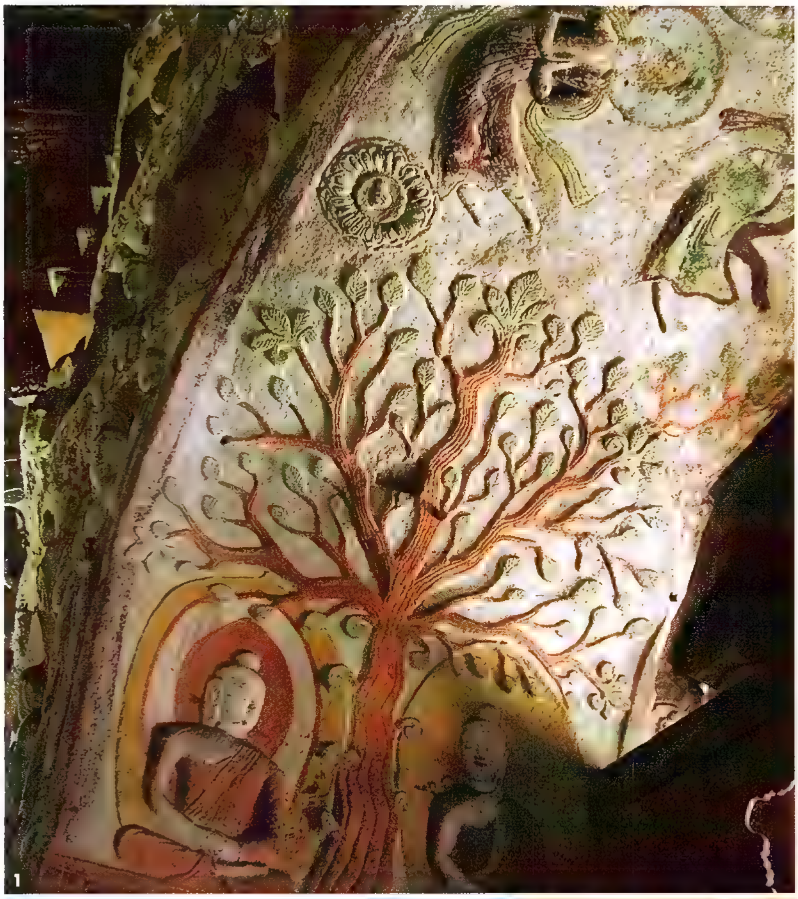
We arrived at our hotel in Datong late at night, so we didn't get an idea of what the 'city of coal,' Datong's nickname, looked like until the next morning when we took a taxi to the Buddhist grotto. We didn't see many high-rise buildings in the city and there were few people on the dusty streets. Soon after our taxi swept past a big coal factory, we found ourselves at the entrance to the Buddhist caves.

For many years it has been standard practice for local officials to build roads to take tourists to famous scenic spots. But the road we took was not new. It used to be part of the National Highway No. 109, which ran past the grottoes. Trucks passed by in an endless stream, fully loaded with the best 'black gold' in China. The dust and soot kicked up by the passing trucks cloaked the precious statues in dust and worsened the erosion of the statues. It was not until 1997 that the officials realised the seriousness of the situation. The highway was soon relocated and the original road was reserved for tourist traffic. Thanks to such efforts, much of the damage to the statues caused by serious pollution and erosion has been prevented.

Noisy Tourists vs. Serene Buddha

Unlike other ancient capitals, Datong didn't look much like a declining 'noble'. Datong was the capital of the Northern Wei Dynasty (386—534) for only 96 years beginning from when Emperor Daowudi moved his capital here. However, this short-lived glory has brought the city a booming tourism industry, as most of the grottoes were dug during Emperor Xiaowendi's reign before he relocated his capital to Luoyang.

Just as I began to feel annoyed by the crush of a package tour group crowding around, I suddenly saw a fresco on the arch door of a cave. Under the lush crown of a bodhi tree sat two Buddhas. In the bright light of the morning sun there was no greater serene and auspicious scene! At that moment, I was so fascinated by the simple and unsophisticated lines that I even forgot the entire hubbub around me. Numerous tourists crowded past the arch, but few noticed this marvellous painting. At the top of the arch were four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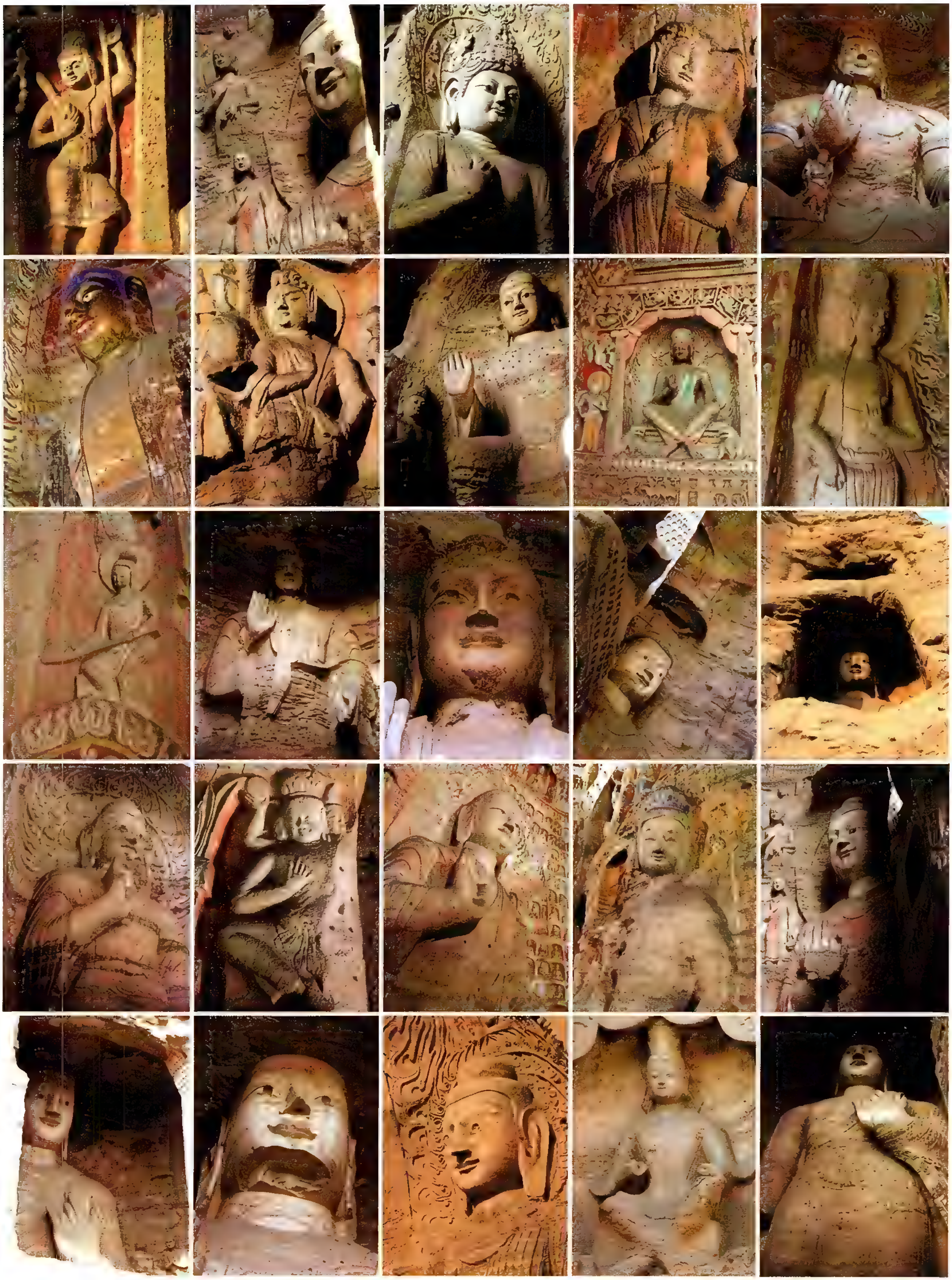
1. The 'two Buddhas under a tree' on the arch of Cave 5 is an impressive piece of art with bright colours and simple lines.

2. Under a clear blue sky, the arcade facade between Caves 9-13 appears as if in Greece.



Everyone will find a Yungang smile of their own.

relief Apsaras, flying with their palms put together and their body in an S shape, like Christian angels. Unfortunately, their heads were only a blur.

Legends of the **Buddha**

Passing through the beautiful arch, I lingered in the cave, hoping to find the 'Smile of Yungang', but left in vain. Disappointed, I headed for Cave 6. Known as 'the museum of Buddhas', the cave had numerous statues of Buddha and Bodhisattva on the walls. No wonder this cave attracted the most visitors, and two guards stood at the entrance to direct the crowds to walk clockwise around the cave — no stopping. I didn't like the controls on our movement, but followed their orders, in order to have a look at the 30-odd relief legends about the Buddha. These are the oldest relief 'serials' still existing in China today, telling the life story of the Buddha — from his birth, his leaving home to become a monk and right up to his attainment of nirvana. The painting about Sakyamuni's birth from his mother underarm was the most vivid and lifelike.

I succumbed to temptation and took many photos in the cave, despite the 'No Photograph' warning. But I didn't use a flash, as I knew the flash would damage the carvings.

Cassock with **Mini-Buddha Statues**

Time passed quickly and by the time noon arrived we had only visited several caves. We found a place to sit down for a rest, from where we could see the caves. The arcade leading between Caves 9-13 looked as if it was from ancient Greece. Though serious erosion had compromised the original carvings on the pillars, the intervals in between offered us a clear view of the florid relief on the front part of the caves. To see even closer up, many tourists gathered before the caves.

Under the autumn sun, I thumbed through the books I had just bought, and my eye was caught by a sentence — 'The Venus in the Orient... lies on the northern outer wall of Cave 5, but is hidden from view by a wooden tower built later.' What a pity. Would such a mysterious image remain beyond the public's eyes forever?

The most wonderful statue was housed in Cave 18. It was said to be modelled on Emperor Taiwudi of the Northern Wei Dynasty, who had launched an intense campaign to eradicate Buddhism and persecute monks. However, after ascending to the throne, his grandson Emperor Xiaowendi immediately reversed the policy. As a way to revive Buddhism, he authorized Tan Yao to build grottoes at Yungang. Legends say that Tan Yao especially designed a cassock full of mini-Buddha statues as part of the statue in Cave 18. Later generations have interpreted this picture of the Buddha gently holding a cassock with his huge hand as Emperor Taiwu's apologizing to the monks killed by on his orders.

But the carving of the Buddha were not as delicate as those of the Bodhisattva on his left. The Bodhisattva's crown was meticulously carved — in the middle of the crown sat a mini-Buddha, flanked by honeysuckles. Erosion to the Bodhisattva's neck only served to set off the beauty of his head.

Tours with **Chinese Characteristics**

Not far from Cave 18 was the famous smiling Buddha I had travelled here to see. Apparently, this statue was originally carved in a cave, but the soft earthen walls soon collapsed and the giant statue was exposed as it is today. Also exposed was the halo pattern behind him, which together makes this statue the trademark image of Yungang Grottoes. However, compared to the serenity of the Buddha's expression, in front of the status was a hubbub of tourists, hawkers and worshippers.

Just when I was about to escape the noise, a man approached me, 'Miss, what about a photo with you holding the Buddha's chin? It brings you good luck.' Such an idea! Popular with many Chinese tourists it may be, but it was hardly the thing for me. I couldn't help but think it might not be so bad to let the 'Smile of Yungang' hide undiscovered in a cave somewhere — at least the Buddha could escape the endless flash of cameras, tourists and incense smoke and find true peace at last.

Translated by Julia Han

Travel Tips

Tourist Information of Yungang:

- It costs 35 yuan for a taxi from Datong to the grottoes. Negotiate with the driver for a return trip.
- Admission: 60 yuan; Opening hours: 08:30 ~ 18:00
- There are more than 200 grottoes, extending for 1 km, and the most beautiful are in the central section (Caves 3-20). You may start from the open-air giant Buddha statue in Cave 20 and then visit the grottoes one by one to the east. Or you can first visit Caves 5 and 6, the most highly rated, before proceeding to the others.
- Prepare your trip with some background reading about the caves and Buddhism to make the most of what you see. Another trip is take a pair of opera glasses to help you see the patterns and relief on the caisson.

Transportation to Datong:

Trains from Beijing take about 6 hours and cost 27 ~ 54 yuan for a hard seat. Long-distance coaches are also available from Beijing and take around 5 hours. You can also take a bus from Taiyuan, capital city of Shanxi Province.

Accommodation in Datong:

- [illegible]: Not in a downtown location, however the hotel features a train ticket booking service.
  [illegible]: A 3, Yongjun Road South [illegible]: (352) 536 8000
- [illegible]: High quality rooms with convenient connections.
  [illegible]: 37 Yingbin Road West [illegible]: (352) 586 8008
- [illegible]: Close to the Railway Station, with convenient transport connections and a restaurant rated 'the best' in Shanxi.
  [illegible]: North side of Datong Railway Station Square [illegible]: (352) 536 6111

Local Scenic Spots

- [illegible]: Huayan Temple, Pingcheng ruins, Nine-Dragon Relief Wall, Great Wall
- [illegible]: Wooden tower in Yingxian County, Suspended Temple, Mount Hengshan

A Pleasure Trip to
Hangzhou

Most people agree that almost all Chinese cities are experiencing rapid change, however whether these changes are beneficial for both the people and the city environment is much disputed. But for Hangzhou, these changes have been nothing but for the good.

Photos • Xie Guanghui, Anita Yeung et al. Article • Anita Yeung

1. Tourists relax by West Lake. (by Xie Guanghui)

2. In the lakeside park, a foreign visitor relaxes with a smoke. (by Xie Guanghui)

3. Open-air coffee shops can be found everywhere, creating a leisurely feel to the city. (by Jiang Jian)

4. Hangzhou people like to practise calligraphy beside the West Lake. On-duty policemen are attracted by this too. (by Anita Yeung)

Experiencing West Lake

The West Lake beautification construction project was completed during China's National Day holidays (1~7 October) in 2003 expanding and upgrading this most famous scenic attraction of Hangzhou. The government offices that once lined the lake and were off-limits to visitors have now been removed. More importantly, all park entrance fees have been dropped. This decision of the local government was highly appreciated, especially when admission fees of tourist attractions all over China have been skyrocketing over the past 10 years.

When you come to Hangzhou, one of your first stops must be the West Lake. At six o'clock in the morning, I strolled from my hotel to Nanshan Road near the West Lake. At the entrance to the lake stands a stone tablet which reads 'Nanshan Road, a commercial street with the biggest potential in China.' Standing across the street as a testament to this statement sits an American coffee shop, Starbucks. My friends told me that Nanshan Road, which runs along the east bank of the West Lake, is beautifully decorated by phoenix trees and lined with high-class coffee shops, bars and restaurants. There is even a Porsche exhibition centre. If you come here at a busy time when the traffic isn't so bad, you might even feel you are in a busy European town.

Wild Trip to Xixi National Wetland Park

Compared to West Lake's grace and maturity, Xixi is like a young girl with a refined face and simple dressing. It is certainly not as famous as the West Lake, but is worth experiencing for a different taste of Hangzhou.

The Xixi National Wetland Park, located in the west of Hangzhou, is about five kilometres from downtown and opened in April 2005. It holds the prestigious honour of being the first wetland park established in China. When you come here, don't expect to visit a high-tech exhibition centre as you find at the Hong Kong Wetland Park. But there is a lot of 'wild' fun that can take you away from the busy city life. Thanks to the considerate policy which restricts the number of visitors to 3,000 per day, you might just feel it to be too serene in Xixi (covering an area of about 10 sq km).

At noon, I ate a farmhouse meal at Yanshui Fishermen's Village. Named 'Waterside Chamber of Reclusion within the City,' the restaurant was well hidden behind some thriving trees and in front of Xixi.

1. Located in the west part of Hangzhou, the Xixi National Wetland Park is about 5 km away from downtown and a quick escape from city life.

2. Fish Balls and Little Fat Fish Head not only look nice but also taste delicious. (by Anita Yeung)

3. Meijiawu has over a hundred years history of growing Longjing tea. (by Anita Yeung)

4. A Qing Dynasty prescription written with patient's symptoms in a Chinese seven-character-per-line poem. The doctors in ancient China enjoyed literary creation while they prescribed medicine. (by Anita Yeung)

5. A 172.5 – cm tall bronze acupuncture point statue exhibited in the Guang Xing Tang Chinese Medicine Hall. (by Anita Yeung)

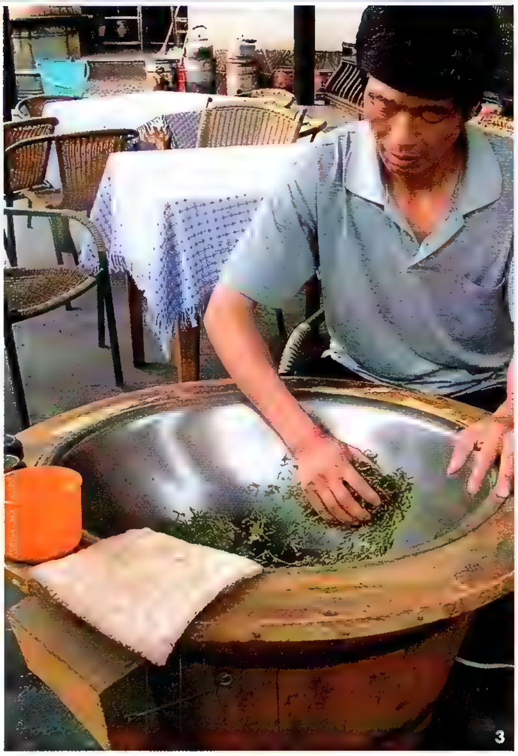
Its elegant wooden structure matched the surrounding environment perfectly. When we entered, cool air blew from inside the lobby as the automatic glass door opened. Having been baked by the scorching sun for most of the day, we were happy to escape inside.

Even though it was a farmhouse restaurant, the food was really good. We dined on Wine-brewed Corn Soup, Little Fat Fish Head, Seafood Fish Balls and more. Highly recommended is the Little Fat Fish Head , a nice combination of spicy flavour and fish taste. Sipping some local 'yellow rice wine' made in Xixi while viewing the primitive scenery outside the window, was the definition of contentment.

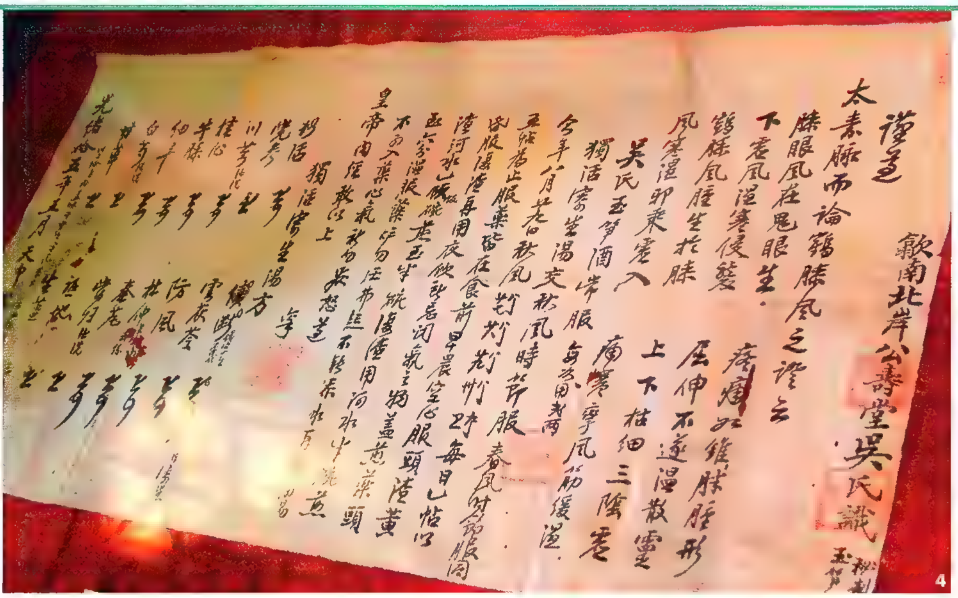
Meijiawu Tea Village

Meijiawu has several hundred years' of history of growing Longjing tea (one of China's most loved and famous teas). Now it has some 1300 *mu* (about 87 hectares) of tea gardens, with an output equal to 1/4 of the total Longjing tea produced at West Lake. April is when the tea farmers roast the tea leaves and prepare the produce for market.

Though not far from Hangzhou, Meijiawu used to be quite unknown because it was hard to get to. In 2000 the municipal government opened a new Meiling Tunnel that enables Hangzhou people to drive to Meijiawu easily. Nowadays, Hangzhou people like to come here on weekends to enjoy Longjing tea and farmhouse dishes.



In 2005, the whole village received 1.6 million foreign guests, with the average yearly income per capita reaching 12,000 yuan. No wonder we saw so many brand new tall buildings. These buildings added a more modern touch to this village, but at the same time took away some of its rustic flavour. Nevertheless, we still like Meijiawu's farm-style dishes and the green, sweet-scented Longjing tea. It offers us the chance to experience Hangzhou people's relaxed personality.



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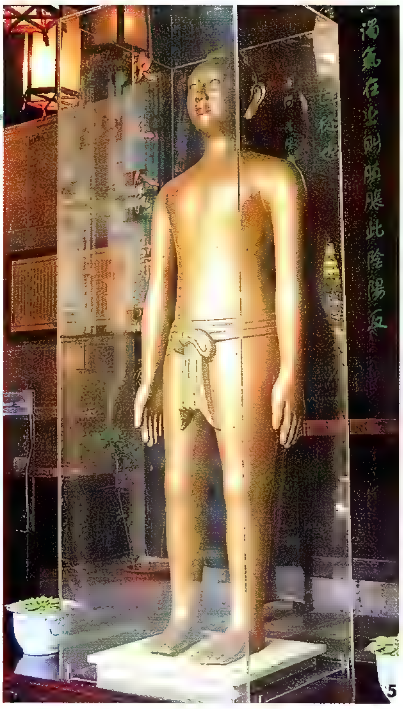

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The Guang Xing Tang Chinese Medicine Hall

We all already know how relaxing drinking tea can be, but can this also be possible by consulting a doctor? At the Guang Xing Tang Chinese Medicine Hall I learnt that it was.

Doctor Zhan Qiang, the operator of the hall, persuaded the municipal government officials (who were once his patients too) to renovate a Qing Dynasty mansion once owned by an official named Liang Kentang. He wanted to provide people with a new experience of traditional Chinese medicine that features consulting, health care, medicinal meals and exhibits of traditional Chinese medicine. This in turn created a wonderful environment in which people can learn about traditional Chinese medicine.

Born in 1718 during the reign of Emperor Kangxi, Liang Kentang was said to be the highest-ranked Hangzhou native in history. The remaining structures of his mansion include a screen, a sedan-chair room, a study and a back-yard garden. Though it was a high-rank official's mansion, it was very simply decorated without usual carvings of traditional features such as the shining dragon or phoenix. The newly built Guang Xing Tang Chinese Medicine Hall, managed by the Hangzhou Traditional Chinese Medicine Hospital, has been set up with internal medicine, genecology, pedology, acupuncture departments and so on. You can also find services like Chinese-style body and foot massage and special medicinal meals tailored to patients needs. Different from other traditional Chinese medical centres, this one offers each doctor a simple but nicely decorated study as their workspace. This helps set it apart as a very comprehensive health centre.

The medicine hall covers an area of over 1,600 square metres and is divided into east and west compounds. The east wing comprises four courtyards while the west has three. Patients wait in the ancient-style lobby which used to be the old mansion's dining room, but if you want to explore, it's recommended to visit the Shuzhongtang Exhibition Hall in the front part of this house.

When my visit to Hangzhou was over, I couldn't help agreeing that Hangzhou is really a blessed place which has produced outstanding people over history and now offers many interesting sights to see.

Translated by Nicole Ouyang

Travel Tips

West Lake Tour

The 15 kilometre full circuit of the West Lake takes 4 hours to walk around. If you don't have enough time, you can just choose to walk around one section of the lake or take the electric tour bus. The bus ride is 1.5 hours and costs 40 yuan. There is only one stop during the bus tour.

Xihu Tiandi
西湖天地

Add: 147 Nanshan Road, Hangzhou
Customer hotline: (571) 8702 6161
Website: www.xihutiandi.com/en

Xixi National Wetland Park
西溪國家濕地公園

Add: Tianmushan Road (extended section), Hangzhou
Tel: (571) 8810 6688 (571) 8810 6696
Admission: 40 yuan; standard boat rental: 40 yuan; special small oar power boat (maximum 6 people) rental: 100 yuan/ hour.
Opening hours: 08:30 ~ 16:30
Website: www.xixiwetland.com.cn/en

Meijiawu Tea Cultural Village
梅家塢茶文化村

Add: 168 Meijiawu Village, Xihu Township, West Lake District, Hangzhou
Contacts: Chunjuan Teahouse (571) 8709 3309, Tianle Teahouse (571) 8732 2106

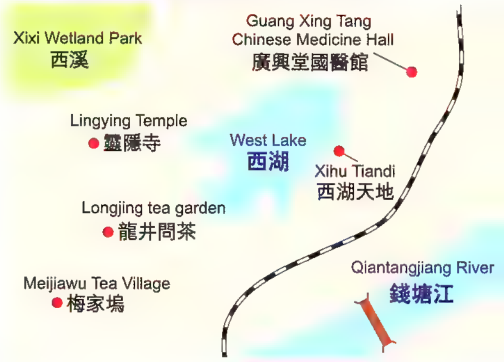
Guang Xing Tang Chinese Medicine Hall 廣興堂國醫館

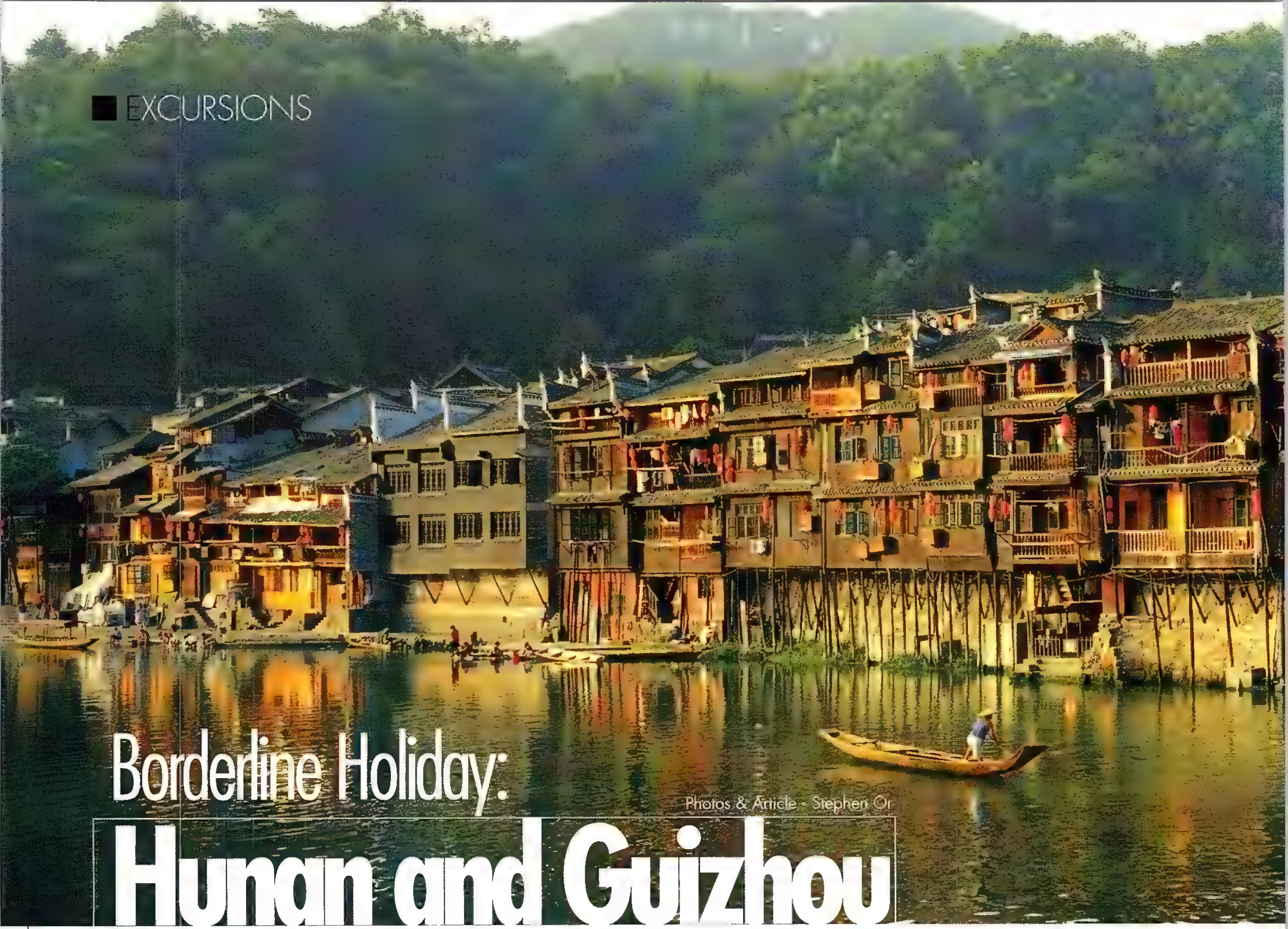
Add: 2 Shuangyanjing Alley, Xiacheng District, Hangzhou
Tel: (571) 8788 1600
Reservation hotline (meals of Chinese herb): (571) 8788 1609

Acknowledgements

Hangzhou Municipal Tourist Association
Organizing Committee of Hangzhou World Leisure Exposition
Xinhua International Culture Communication Co. Ltd
EGL Tours
Hong Kong Express Airways Limited

Tourist Map of Hangzhou City Area





Borderline Holiday: Hunan and Guizhou

Photos & Article - Stephen Or

As the bus left the Guangzhou-Shenzhen Highway and entered the Nanling Mountains, the number of houses along the road gradually dwindled. After we crossed over the hills, Hunan Province came into view.

We set off from the economically developed Zhujiang Delta by bus in the morning and arrived in Changsha that night. Along the way, we passed through the Guangzhou, Shaoguran and Danxia districts of northern Guangdong and Chenzhou and Hengyang in Hunan, enjoying the beautiful, constantly changing scenery.

Fenghuang — Relaxed Riverside Pace

Leaving Changsha the next day for the town of Fenghuang (Phoenix), we passed Changde, the prototype setting for *Peach Blossom Brook* by Tao Yuanming (365—427), a poet of the Eastern Jin Dynasty. By March, the peach blossoms are close to blooming. A covered walkway filled with Chinese poems of a thousand years follows the bank of the Yuanjiang River. Here visitors may marvel at the literary grace of ancient Chinese — or at least test their knowledge of the more archaic characters!

Writer Shen Congwen's (1902—1988) vivid description of Fenghuang (Phoenix) town, on the Hunan-Guizhou border, draws many Chinese visitors and settlers. I, too, was fascinated by the streets, alleyways and houses of this ancient city, but just visiting the scenic spots is really not

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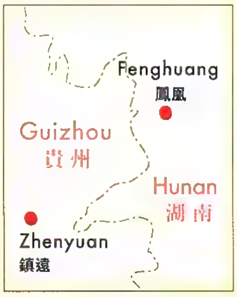
D1 Fly from Hong Kong/Shenzhen to Changsha, capital of Hunan Province (stay in Changsha).

D2 After breakfast take the bus to Fenghuang. Try the local specialty, Bloody Duck, and enjoy the evening on the Tuojiang River (stay in Fenghuang).

D3 Take pictures of the Tuojiang River in the early morning and visit Zhenyuan by bus in the afternoon (stay in Zhenyuan).

D4 Visit the ancient Black Dragon Cave, the Catholic Church and the Palace of the Queen of Heaven in the morning. Leave Zhenyuan for Guangzhou that night by train.



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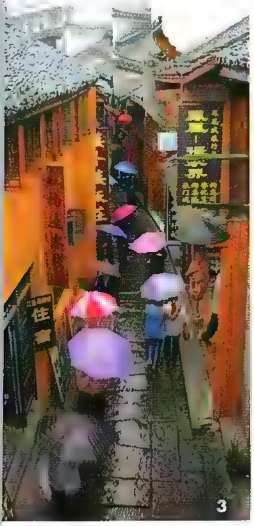
enough. You must take your time to soak in the unhurried pace-by strolling along the Tuojiang River, relaxing at a teahouse or just watching the tourists come and go, you can have the time of your life.

In Fenghuang anyone can eat the Bloody Duck, a local specialty, somewhat like the Canard Au Sang of Paris. Nothing beats sitting in a quiet riverside restaurant listening to the mellow songs of the Miao ladies, dining on Bloody Duck and stir-fried wild fungus, and drinking Miao glutinous rice wine. The *dai pai dongs* by the Tuojiang River are always crowded with people nibbling from several skewers of grilled meat at once. And every visitor must try the diced meat dipped in a special western Hunan chilli powder. Fantastic!



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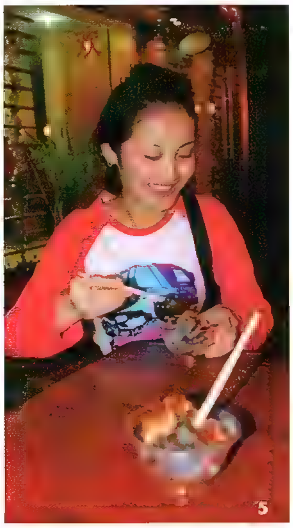

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1. Riverside houses along the Tuojiang River.
2. Night on a flagstone street in ancient Fenghuang.
3. Light rain lends a special charm to an old street in Fenghuang.
4. Streaming hot Gaocao cakes of western Hunan.
5. Fermented bean curd, a famous Changsha snack.
6. Tuojiang River on a misty morning.

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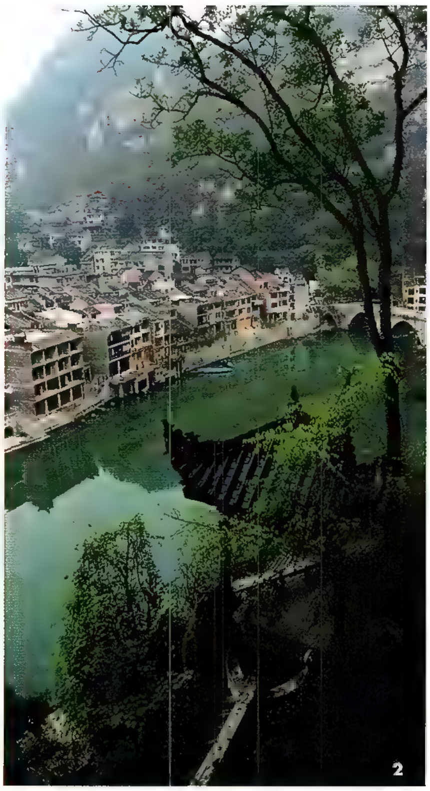

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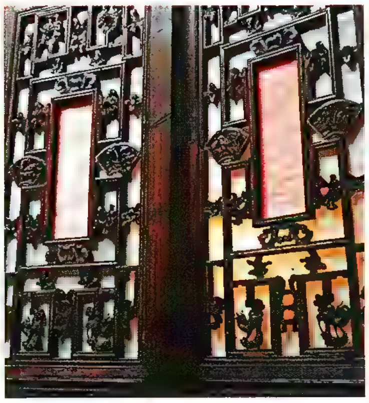
For a relaxing and romantic holiday, stay in Fenghuang's homey inns along the Tuojiang River. Partly hanging over the river on stilts, each inn affords a view of the clear green river water from the windows. At night you can set tiny lanterns afloat on the water, a custom meant to bring you good luck and blessings.

Zhenyuan — At War No More

While is more convenient to go to Zhenyuan, in Guizhou, by train from Huaihua, I wanted to travel through the hills of western Hunan, so I went to by bus instead. Not long after leaving Fenghuang I spotted the so-called 'great wall of the south', which is about 150 km long. The 'twin cities' of Fenghuang and Zhenyuan were linked by the great wall in the past. Today, the Miao people are no longer rebellious and the wall is falling apart.

Zhenyuan used to be a central stop along China's Marine Silk Road and a main military passageway connecting Central China with the southwest border areas. In ancient times, Fenghuang guarded the entrance to Hunan while Zhenyuan guarded the passage out of Guizhou. The two cities had much in



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common once, historically, geographically and culturally, but over time they have developed completely different characters.

Zhenyuan is quieter and more peaceful. No trace of its earlier warring years remains. Everywhere you go you can see people gathering together to warm themselves around stoves while chatting on every subject. They prefer an ordinary, comfortable life to the military ventures of the past. The Blue Dragon Cave in Zhenyuan incorporates Buddhist, Confucian and Taoist influences. The small city also has Catholic and Protestant churches.

While most residents of Zhenyuan and Fenghuang are Han, their diets have distinctive ethnic flavours. Fenghuang favours Tujia cuisine while Zhenyuan leans to Miao-style dishes. But both places have a penchant for hot dishes; hot and salty in Fenghuang, hot and sour in Zhenyuan. At first taste, Tujia dishes are a bit salty but after a few good chews the rich flavour of western Hunan cuisine comes through. Miao dishes are more accessible, such as the visually appealing hot and sour fish soup with its appetizing smell. Prepared with fish caught fresh from the Wuyang River, it lingers deliciously on the tongue.

If you like busy, lively places, Fenghuang will suit you well. But if you find it too commercial, consider visiting the less touristy Zhenyuan. Better yet, experience them both on the same trip.

Translated by Wang Zengfen

1. Zhusheng Bridge near Blue Dragon Cave, Zhenyuan.
2. View of ancient Zhenyuan from on high.
3. Happy children play on Shuncheng Street, Zhenyuan.
4. The city has a simple, yet elegant ancient charm.
5. The southern 'great wall' once linked Fenghuang and Zhenyuan.
6. A catherdral in Zhenyuan.

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Travel Tips

Transportation

There are scheduled flights between Hong Kong, Shenzhen or Guangzhou and Changsha, capital city of Hunan Province.

- A regular bus is sent off from Huaihua to Fenghuang every 40 minutes, taking about two hours. Contact Fenghuang Bus Station (743) 322 1558
- A regular bus is sent off from Jishou to Fenghuang every 20 minutes, taking about one hour.
- There are many buses from Fenghuang to Tongren till 16:30 taking about one hour. Contact Tongren Bus Station (856) 525 2301
- There is no direct bus going from Fenghuang to Zhenyuan. You may take the bus first to Huaihua then change another one to Zhenyuan or charter a car from Fenghuang to Zhenyuan with a distance of 180 km, taking about three hours and costing about 350 yuan. Or you may take the bus first to Tongren, then charter a car with a distance of 130 km, taking about two hours and about 250 yuan.
- The train, K66, from Zhenyuan to Guangzhou takes about 18 hours.

Accommodation

Changsha	[illegible] Hotel *****	
	Standard room: 280 yuan	Tel: (731) 440 2888
	Hehuayuan Mansion ****	
	Standard room: 198 yuan	Tel: (731) 414 0888
Fenghuang	Bianke Hotel by the Longevity Palace	Tel: (743) 326 0411
	Tuojiang Renjia by the Hongqiao Bridge	Tel: (743) 322 4558
Zhenyuan	Fucheng Hotel	Tel: (855) 581 7999
	[illegible] Guzhen Hotel	Tel: (855) 572 7777

* Special thanks to Kwan Kin Travel

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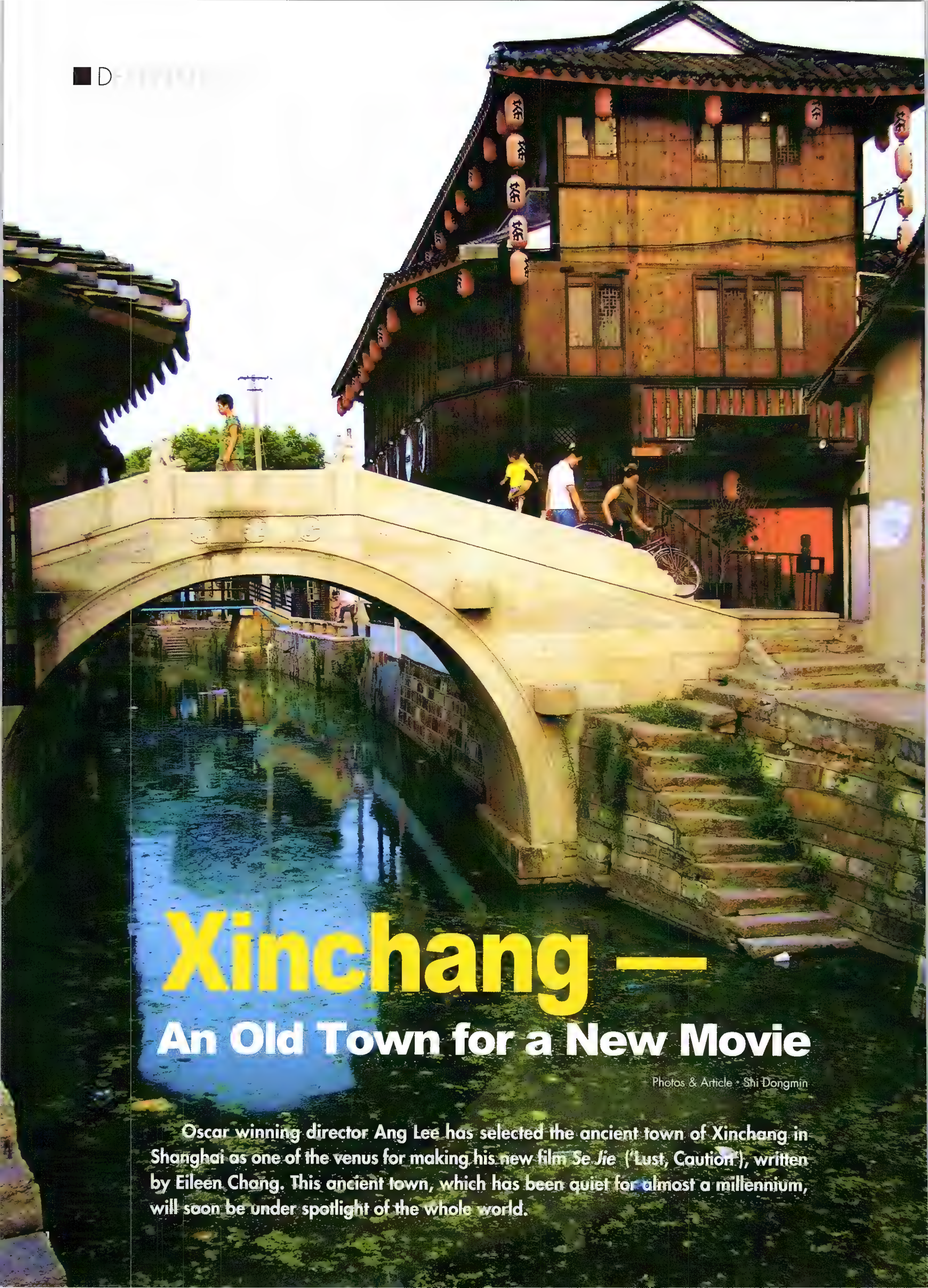

Xinchang —

An Old Town for a New Movie

Photos & Article · Shi Dongmin

Oscar winning director Ang Lee has selected the ancient town of Xinchang in Shanghai as one of the venus for making his new film *Se Jie* ('Lust, Caution'), written by Eileen Chang. This ancient town, which has been quiet for almost a millennium, will soon be under spotlight of the whole world.

The Story of Se Jie ~

It is the story of patriotic, revolutionary activity and Anti-Japanese War before Japan surrendered in the Second World War. The plot involves both a true and false spy and true and false love and shuttles between Hong Kong and Shanghai.

Nostalgic Xinchang Town

With its name meaning 'new venue' in English, Xinchang however is quite a place of nostalgia. Like other water towns in China, Xinchang combines the typical small bridges, streams, riverside households as well as the characteristic white walls and black tiles. The history of the town dates back to the Song Dynasty more than a thousand years ago. Yet, with the rapid urbanization, it is facing the destiny of being rebuilt.

Xinchang still keeps the intact pattern of an ancient water town — a three-kilometre long main street left from the period of Ming and Qing dynasties, an area of buildings dating from the Qing Dynasty covering 200,000 square metres and at least 20 mansions with the traditional Chinese building structure comprising entry levels. Among the 635 unmovable historical relics recently announced by the Shanghai Municipal Heritage Management Committee, Xinchang accounts for 30 of them.

Beside the famous Nanshan Buddhist Temple, there are two ginkgo trees that are already 700 years old. The temple is absolutely quiet, but open for pilgrims to burn incense and make wishes. Though the temple has been refurbished, it still preserves an ancient cottage from the Yuan Dynasty. What is interesting is that travellers can see the ruins of buildings representing Buddhism (Nanshan Temple), Taoism (Dongyue Temple), and Christianity (Xinchang Christ Hall) all within the small area of just 0.69 sq km.

Visiting the Old Mansions

Setting foot on the old streets in the town one can see the old-fashioned private residences, shops and narrow lanes typical of Southern China. Beside the Hongqiao Bridge, there is even a Chinese restaurant acclaimed as 'No. 1 of South China'. Children and housewives pass by the tranquil streets occasionally and on their faces one can read a kind of honest rural feeling. Riverside residences are built of wind and fire proof walls of more than ten metres high and 40 to 70 metres long. A view from the top offers one a grand panorama of the town.

The inner chambers of these residences have three entrances with delicately carved beams and painted rafters. The old residence leads to a brook at the rear where there is a revetment whose foundation

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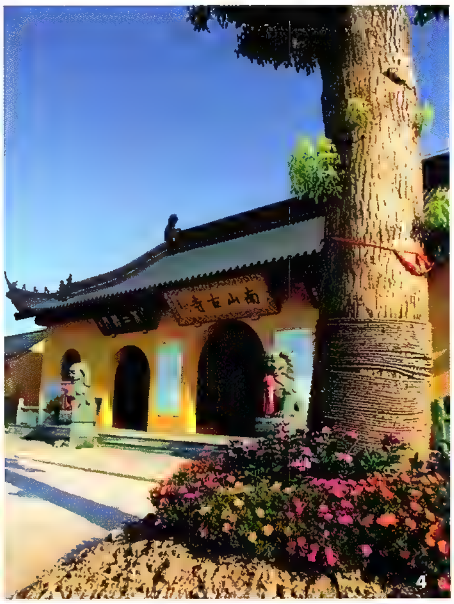

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1. Xinchang is the best preserved ancient town of Pudong district in Shanghai.

2-4. In this small town of just 0.69 sq km, travellers can see the ruins of buildings of Buddhism (Nanshan Temple), Taoism (Dongyue Temple), and Christianity (Xinchang Christ Hall).

About the Author ~

Eileen Chang (Zhang Ailing), a Chinese writer, was born in Shanghai in 1920 and died in Los Angeles in 1995. Her works frequently deal with the tensions between men and women in love.

stone experts suggest is a relic of the Yuan Dynasty. The stone stairways of the revetment are covered by an eave and leads to the inner courtyard directly. This peculiar building structure can rarely be found anywhere. In some older residences there are even private bridges (which are open to the public nowadays) which connect to the garden. Historically the Zhangs, Yes, Zhous, Zhus, Mins and Xis were the most influential families in Xinchang.

In the early Republic of China period, more distinctive mansions were constructed. Some of them introduced Chinese and Western styles, coloured and patterned glass, imported mosaic, etc... which perfectly match the descriptions in Eileen Chang's story.

Glory of Old Bridges

There has been a saying that the little town of Xinchang was as famous as the garden city Suzhou or Zhujiajiao in Shanghai. Legend also has it that stalagmites were found in the gulf of Stone Bay under the Shou'en Bridge in Xinchang. Therefore, the town is also known as Shixun (Stalagmite) Lane. The remaining arch stone bridges in the town include the Hongfu (Bliss) Bridge, Qianqiu (Century-old) Bridge, Baihu (White Tiger) Bridge, Yanghui (Showing Glory) Bridge,

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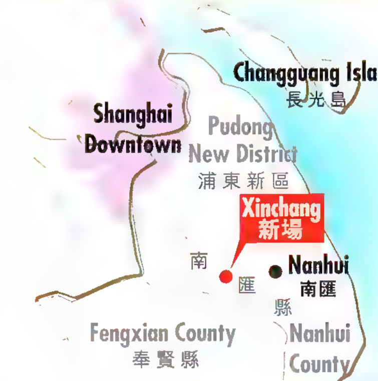
Yuhuangge (Court of Jade Emperor) Bridge, Yongning (Ever Peaceful) Bridge, and Shengjia (Flourishing Family) Bridge. Besides, the decorated archways of Xinchang are also well known in the field of building art and architecture.

What deserves to be mentioned is that there was once a memorial archway at the crossroad of Xinchang Old Street. It was established to commemorate the three generations of a family surnamed Zhu having become second highest government officials in different periods. The archway was beautifully decorated by lively carvings of carts, horses, birds and flowers, hence winning it the reputation of the 'first archway of South China'.

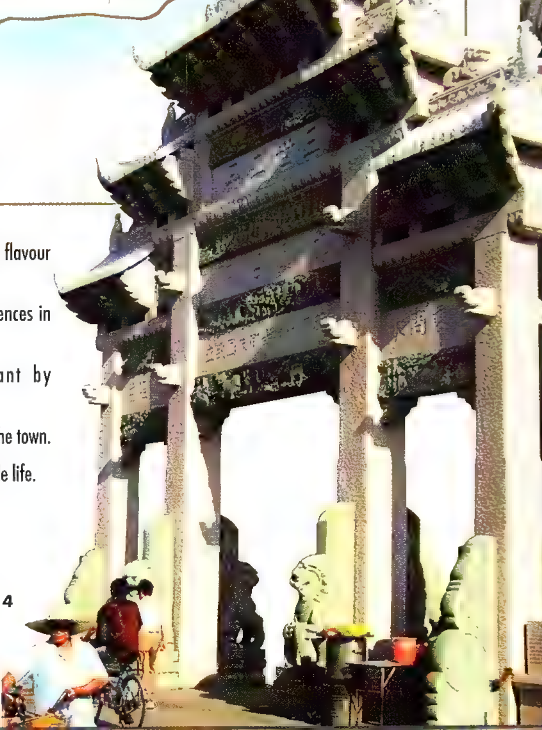
Taking a stroll along the riverside in the rear city, the highlight for sight-seeing will be the water pier. Its stone revetments are built with stone blocks shaped like the nose of an ox and many other exquisite and creative patterns. Today, such man-made piers cannot be found. No wonder the town is a treasure for the relic experts.

Translated by Kristy Wong

Getting there: Depart from downtown Shanghai, take the tourist bus No. 2 or Hunan (Southern Shanghai) Route and get off at Xinchang stop.



1. A garden of South China flavour in Xinchang.
2. Typical waterside residences in the old town.
3. A Chinese restaurant by Hongqiao Bridge.
4. A memorial archway in the town.
5. The residents live a simple life.



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Destiny of an Old Oil Mill

Photos & Article · Chen Tuanjie

Deep in the mountains of the Loess Plateau by a branch of the Yellow River, stand a few remaining old oil mills. As many as a dozen were said to have been functioning in this area 10 years ago, but with the advent of modern technology they have closed, one after another. This century-old mill is the only one still in good working order, both literally and financially, but it's getting harder to keep it going.....

The rumbling wooden timbers and rhythmic work songs that fill the air hark back to an earlier era. The fragrance of rapeseed oil rising from the old mill is intoxicating, even from thousands of metres away. During the past five years, I have occasionally visited the mill to take pictures, to see if any changes have taken place, to record the lives of the workers and to absorb their cheerful outlook to their hard way of life.

Lius' Hundred-Year-Old Mill

Many places on the ancient Loess Plateau take their names from the oil business, including Youfang (Oil Mill) Town, Youfang Lane and Youfang Village. Each of these places must either have had a mill once or had something to do with the process.

Lius' Oil Mill at Wufengshan (Five Peaks Hill) in Liquan County, Shaanxi Province is around a century old and one of the few mills where all the work is still done by manual labour. It passed through different ownership for generations, and is currently owned by Liu Xiwu, a man in his 50s. After repeated splits and mergers, the mill is now in the hands of the Lius once again.

Lius' is a typical old mill. In spite of mechanical advances in the industry over the years, the work here is still done completely by hand. The operation occupies two larger caves for the mill itself within a courtyard of six such spaces, the others being used as a kitchen, living quarters and all the apparatus used in oil refining. Though conditions are basic and rough, everything is in good order.

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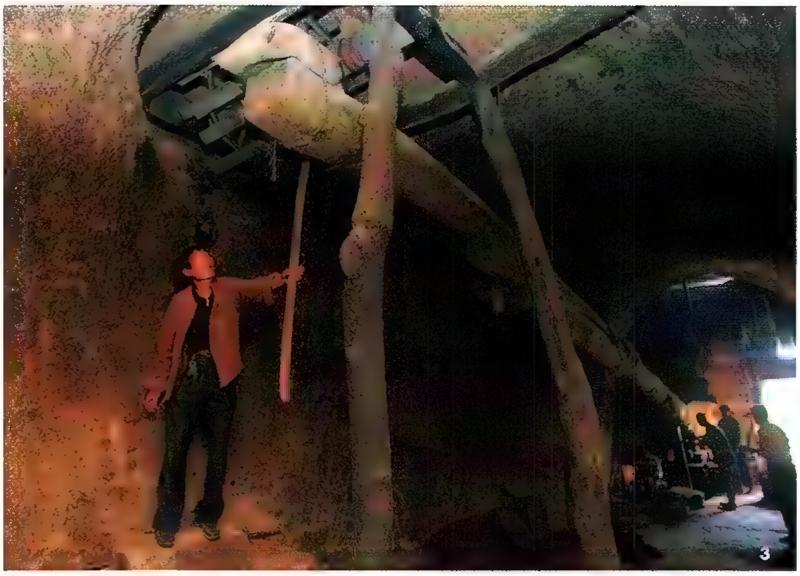
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Lius' uses the level principle to extract oil, a process referred to as 'Qian Jin Zha' — that is, weighing down one end of a 15-metre-long beam with stones weighing more than 500 kg and placing piles of rapeseed blocks at the other — a truly primitive method.

1. After pounding the rapeseed, the workers will bind it into 'pancakes'.

2. Oil mills are often located by an out-of-the-way gully.

3. After the first pressing, more stones are piled on to increase the pressure; at the other end of the timber, the bundled rapeseeds are ready for pressing.

A Trade Requiring Skill and Strength

Grinding and raising the tightly pressed rapeseed blocks to the beams requires power. Before the advent of electricity, oil mills were established near rivers and streams, and powered by waterwheels. At first Lius' Oil Mill operated by the Ganhe River, using a waterwheel to drive the millstones and raise the rapeseed blocks.

At that time waterside areas were not easily accessible, so the rapeseed had to be physically carried down to the water and the processed oil carried back up again. After 1949, along with the development of modern industry, the oil mill was taken over by a production brigade. In the 1960s, the brigade moved the milling equipment to a new oil mill at a higher and more level place. In the 1980s after the introduction of the contracted responsibility system, Mr Liu took up his old trade again and moved the oil mill to an abandoned courtyard on a nameless gullet; he also made some improvements to the processing tools.

So the fate of the old oil mill has changed, along with that of the Lius, for generations. Having learned the secrets of the trade from his forebears, Mr Liu is well known in the area for his skill and experience — he can extract more than 15 kg of oil from every 50 kg of rapeseed. As the genealogy records are lost, he doesn't know how many generations of his family have been engaged in the trade.

Honesty and credibility are the basis of Mr Liu's business, as practised by his ancestors. He takes great care through the entire process, from drying the rapeseed in the sun, sifting the seeds and moulding them into blocks, steaming, and pressing to separate the blocks again. Working in the old oil mill requires both skill and strength. Every year when the operation starts up again, Mr Liu enlists three to five workers to help him. Liu Zhiping, Liu Bizheng and Fan Donglin are mainstays who were invaluable in helping him learn about the trade once the business was back in his hands. Yet no matter how busy Mr Liu is, he overseas every major step, for if the quality is not guaranteed, his reputation will be ruined.

A Two-Day Job

The business is seasonal. Each time the old oil mill opens for operation, Mr Liu sets off firecrackers to pray for good luck, and to remind the neighbourhoods that the oil mill is working again.

The biggest cave houses the oil pressing equipment. The dark and spacious workshop is all most completely filled by the two massive beams used in the pressing process. These heavy timbers, measuring 15 metres in length and one metre across, were bought second-hand from other oil mills when the mill was built centuries ago and are covered with oil and dust from years of use. A round wooden bucket one-metre across and 0.8-metre high standing in a corner of the workshop is used for ground and steamed rapeseed. In another corner of the cave clank the millstones, which were formerly driven by water or draught animals but which now run by electricity. They operate 24 hours a day. A big earthen stove, almost two metres across, stands nearby heating the large pot in which the rapeseed is steamed. Rows of round blocks of extracted rapeseed are also piled up in the cave.

After the selected rapeseed is ground into powder on the millstone, workers steam this in the pot. Although their faces are often burned by steam and they are sweating heavily, they don't dare leave the pot. As soon as the rapeseed is steamed, the workers must quickly pour the mixture into snakeskin sacks and

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bind them into blocks with wooden hoops before placing them in a special oil well. A batch of five such blocks is pressed together in the oil well by use of the lever system. Bright, clear oil then oozes out little by little into an earthen urn over the course of three pressings. The whole process takes over two days. In the same courtyard, however, the Old Oil Mill's modern machines do the same amount of work in just three hours.

A Lengthy Process

In the workshop three men, all stripped to the waist, were busy pounding the rapeseed sacks into round and firm blocks. In no time, they had shaped and piled five rapeseed blocks under the huge timbers. The blocks must rest precisely one upon the other, or the extraction process will not go smoothly. With the last block in place, a man shouted something while turning the wooden wheel nearby. As if by magic, the pile of rapeseed blocks shrank as the golden transparent oil trickled out slowly and the men's work songs gradually grew louder.

As soon as the oil began to flow, Liu Bizheng scooped up half a ladle and drank it down. 'Delicious!' he said while wiping his mouth.

Heated rapeseed oil is said to be good for treating stomach and intestinal problems. I have never checked the scientific support for this, but many who have tried this remedy report good results.

Liu Xiwu, who has owned this mill for decades, described the old process: 'After drying the rapeseed in the sun, we grind the seeds into powder on millstones; then we steam them and put the steamed seeds in wooden buckets with a layer of straw (now snakeskin sacks). We press the sacks tightly and bind them into thick circular 'pancakes' with hemp rope (now we use steel wires). Then we place the 'pancakes', five at a time, under the large wooden beams for pressing. Under the pressure of stones weighing more than 500 kg, the 'pancakes' secrete oil, which flows along stone grooves into the earthen urn. There are over 20 steps to the whole process!'

Hard Work, Sweet Results

September on the Loess Plateau is cool, as summer's heat has already receded. But as they heaved the rapeseed blocks, the workers were quickly coated in sweat. To an outsider, things looked a bit chaotic, but everyone was following their usual routine. Liu Zhiping, who has a sunny disposition, cracked some half-dirty jokes as he worked, making his fellow workmates convulse with laughter. Throughout the oil extraction process, including harvesting and threshing, every drop of oil comes from hard labour.

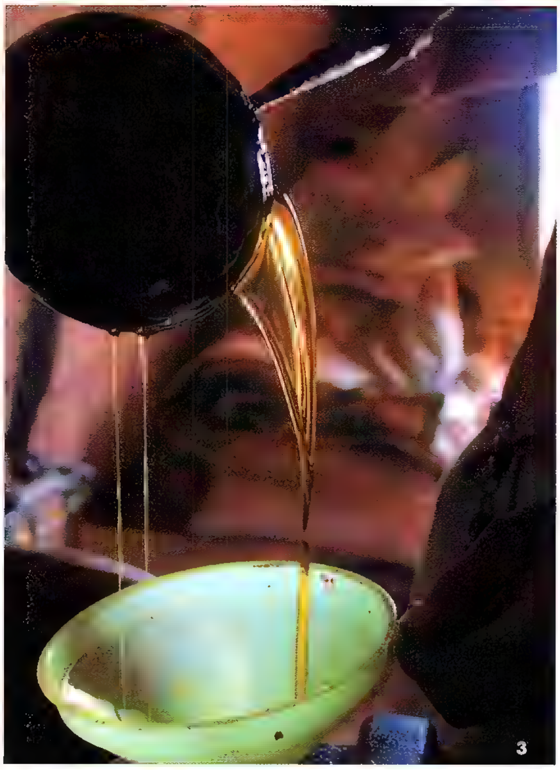
While the men were busy working, Mrs Liu did the cooking — simple meals of porridge and steamed bread or noodles — three times a day. The boss eats the same food together with the workers. Occasionally, whenever a client might treat the workers to a kilogram of oil, the boss would produce some flour to prepare deep-fried dough cakes for them. Dough cakes washed down with a little cheap liquor make a tasty treat, especially accompanied by a few stanzas of loudly sung Shaanxi opera. Mr Liu's 19-year-old daughter stayed at home after graduating

1. The mill's pressing process works on the lever principle — workers weigh down one end of the parallel 15-metre-long timber with heavy stones.

2. How much time and labour is required to produce oil, from field to press?

3. Modern technology has spelled the end of the old oil mills. The skill will die with the old masters and this millstone will soon lay idle.

4. Rapeseed is dried in the oil mill yard each afternoon.



1. Workers must bear the heat of the steaming pot.

2. Hand washing turns the water into 'oil'.

3. Many villagers prefer the taste of manually produced rapeseed oil.

from junior high school. She helps out whenever she's free, drying rapeseed or the doing accounts.

And the Future...?

Over the last 20 years, the number of manually run oil mills has dropped from dozens in the 1980s to just one or two today thanks to modernization. But Lius' Oil Mill continues to do well because many farmers do not care for the taste of machine-extracted oil.

'On the surface, things are not too bad, but we are no longer as busy as we once were; these days the mill is open for business two months of the year. It is a sunset trade that will be replaced sooner or later. People in the city now cook with raw soybean oil, and maybe in a couple of years the farmers will also eat this way!' Talking about the future, Mr Liu realized his oil mill would have to shut sooner or later. He hasn't passed his skills on to his son, but wants him to concentrate on his studies instead.

Everything has a life cycle, even the old oil mill. When it is gone, we can only cherish its memories.

Translated by Yu Ling

Extracting Rapeseed Oil, the Old-fashioned Way

1. Harvest rapeseed →2. Thresh → 3. Winnow (separate rapeseed pips from husks with the aid of the wind) → 4. Dry in the sun (for preservation) → 5. Store → 6. Dry in the sun again (in preparation for oil extraction) → 7. Sift → 8. Grind rapeseed into powder on millstones → 9. Steam (in a big iron pot; as one of the main steps affecting oil extraction, this is technically demanding) → 10. Pound and bind rapeseed into blocks → 11. Raise the tightly pressed blocks and place them under the beams (a crucial step in oil extraction) → 12. Press (repeat twice between steaming and oil extraction) → 13. Collect the oil in an earthen urn

1. Affixing the 'lucky beam' is the grandest ceremony during house construction. When the 'lucky beam' is ready, people cover it with a piece of red cloth. It is a very carefully followed process.

Affixing the 'Lucky Beam'

Photos • Li Yaobo Article • Dong Ai

The Bai ethnic people living in Dali, Southwest China's Yunnan Province, usually build houses in the winter. As they don't have much water to farm in the dry weather, they are freer. And before completing the frame of a new house they hold a special ceremony — 'Shang Xi Liang' which means affixing the 'lucky beam'.

Over one hundred clan members come to help out and family relatives all wear nice clothes to congratulate the host. The date of the ceremony is usually decided by a fengshui master. Thanks to a business trip, I was able to attend such a ceremony at Baiyi Village in Heqing, Dali, which was quite an experience.

Hospitable Host

Baiyi Village, about four kilometres north of Heqing County, is a Bai ethnic village surrounded by beautiful rivers and bamboo.

A Bai woman living in the east of the village told us that a family was about to prop up the 'Xi Liang' today and the host would be delighted to have us there. Upon hearing this, we jumped in our car immediately and arrived there within five minutes. We saw nearly 100 young men singing work songs and carrying the frame of the house on their shoulders.

A man of more than 60 years old with a glass of wine in each hand approached me and said: 'Welcome, our guests from afar. Today is a joyous occasion. So, please drink this glass of wine and accept my hospitality.' Tired as I was after the long-distance journey, I couldn't refuse the host's hospitality and drank all the wine in the glass. The man said: 'We're propping up the 'Xi Liang' for my youngest son and we did it for my third son just a few days ago. There's an unwritten obligation in the village that the friends of the host who is building a house should come to lend a hand wherever they are, whether in the village or not; otherwise, anyone who doesn't come should submit 500 yuan as a "fine" which is used to buy cigarettes, alcohol and candies to entertain the people who are helping. After we prop up the "lucky beam", we will treat all of you to a feast.'

1.Following the traditional customs, the Bai paint the 'lucky beam' red, an auspicious colour. The house owner's wife and father kowtow and propose a toast.

2. A pig head, rice dumplings and rice cakes, etc. are displayed on the 'Eight Immortals table' for the ceremony of propping up the lucky beam.

3. The *fengshui* master sticks the Eight Diagrams on the 'lucky beam'.

4. The women, who are coming for the festivities, crowded around to watch the show, with beaming smiles on their faces.

5,6. In accordance with the tradition, the standard feast consists of eight dishes. The most traditional dish is braised pork. People will judge the meal as good or bad based on the taste of this dish.

Fengshui and Construction Collide

Anyone setting foot on Bai territory will be deeply impressed by the white walled houses with black-tiled roofs. The houses' main rooms generally face west, with two wing rooms facing each other and a screening wall in front of the courtyard, forming an enclosed structure. The house has a tapered shape, with the roof being mild and elegant with each end gently turning up. The windows on the outer walls are decorated with black-and-white paintings and are seldom open. The local people pay special attention to the decorations on the gate and the screening wall.

The Bai are particular about the exposure of a new house. They believe that the main room must face a mountain, in this way the family will have prosperity. This house however, faces the Phoenix Hill — the most auspicious hill in the village.

Before starting to build a house, the local people still follow a series of traditional customs. They will invite a *fengshui* master to choose an auspicious date to start the construction and decide when to hold and complete the ceremony of 'Shang Xi Liang'. The determined date should complement the house owner's Chinese Zodiac sign and the direction of the house.

Usually it takes over half a year from laying the foundation to propping up the 'lucky beam'. Because the Bai's territory sits on an earthquake zone, the locals attach much importance to the earthquake-proof characteristics of their houses. The foundations laid are particularly strong and the reinforcements complete the framework. The wooden poles are propped up by stone blocks to help them stand

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against the strong wind and frequent earthquakes. The load-bearing columns are all natural-shaped timber, sitting with the thin ends up and the thick ends down. Using this method there is no waste produced and the natural properties of timber are fully utilized to reinforce the house. Since the columns lean slightly inward, it stabilizes the house by being sharp on top and flat below.

The Grand Ceremony

After lunch, I was listening carefully to Master He's funny stories about the Bai when they were building houses when suddenly I heard a burst of fireworks. I saw more than 10 men walking into the room carrying pigs' heads and chickens in their hands, and hauling steamed buns, rice dumplings, brown sugar and rice cakes on their backs. Later, I was told by the house owner that these were all close relatives. They came here for the ceremony. Dressed in nice clothes, everyone brought gifts with them, which I learned was proper etiquette.

Around 1:30 p.m., the *fengshui* master came wearing a hat and a military uniform. He was holding a brush, ink, paper and an inkstone in his hands. Following customs, he then took out some couplets and asked people to stick them first on the northern columns and then on the southern ones.

Afterwards he arranged several women to set up the 'Eight Immortals Table' in the centre of the new houses frame. He then took out the Eight Diagrams, 'Five-Dragon Water' (it is said that the water is taken from the Black, Red, White, Green and Yellow Dragon's pools in Yunnan), a bottle with 'Five Grains' and some gold and silver, a pig head, rooster, rice dumplings, crushed citronella, steamed buns, a decilitre of rice and carpenter's tools and display them on the table. Then he burned incense.

At around two o'clock in the afternoon the 'lucky beam' was ready. The carpenter put the red-paint beam on a wooden horse in front of the Eight Immortals Table. After a burst of fireworks, the *fengshui* master held the rooster and walked around the table, murmuring. And then he pinched the cockscomb and squeezed its blood on the middle of the 'lucky beam'. Later, he stuck the Eight Diagrams and a banner on which says 'Zi Wei Gao Zhao' (Lucky Star Shines Above) on the centre of the 'lucky beam'. Then he covered it with a piece of black cloth. When this was completed, he asked the owner's father and daughter-in-law to kowtow and toast before the table, then came the relatives.

In fact, the 'lucky beam' is actually a cross beam. The carpenters climbed up to the girder and walked carefully to the middle and lowered red ropes. The people below tied the red ropes to the beam. Then the carpenters poured the 'Five-Dragon Water' down onto it and wrapped the bottle in red cloth, tying it to the middle of the beam, all the time uttering some auspicious words. After that, the carpenters lowered the ropes again to pull up the steamed buns, five grains, rice dumplings, and nickel coins given by the relatives. The house owner's father wore an apron, and stood in the centre, ready to catch the steamed buns. Then the carpenters tossed down rice dumplings, five grains and nickel coins. Everyone below scurried for them as it was said that anyone who collected them would be blessed.

Translated by Nicole Ouyang

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Start of a caravan in Pokhara for the Salt Road to Mustang.

Across the **Borders of Tibet**

A Buddhist pilgrim in Leh.

Tibet has been more than just the high plateau of today's western China. Based on 1,600-year old trading routes across its physical borders, Tibetan culture has spread over the fringing snow clad mountain giants: the Karakorum to the west, the Himalayas to the south, the Kunlun to the northeast and the eastern longitudinal ranges. With the opening of the Friendship Highway from Lhasa to Kathmandu, capital city of Nepal, in the mid-1980s, the first modern access to the international community was made. Then in 2003 two further new trading posts along the Tibet-Nepal border were opened, one in Mustang (west-central Nepal) and another in Sankhuwasabha (east of Mount Everest).

Photos & Article • Dr. Engelbert Altenburger

Dancing Ladakhi people in Leh.

A herd of yaks on the vast plateau.

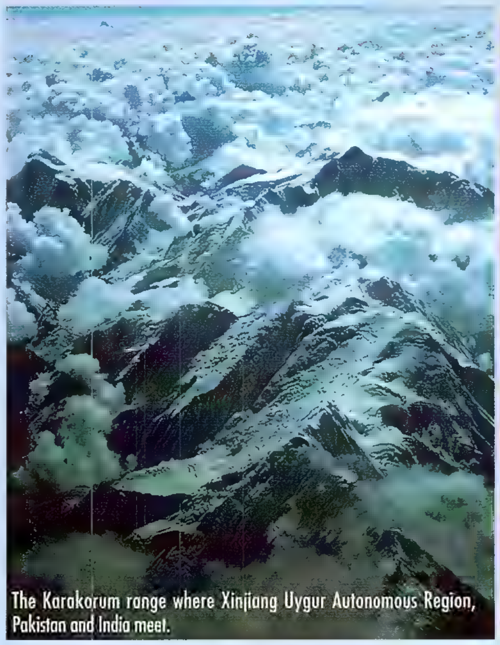
Decades have passed, since Tibet had come under the rule of China during mid-20th century and the dream of Greater India (Akhand Bharat) had come to an end. Old wounds are now healing along the 3,500-km long, still disputed China-India borderline, while Hindus, Buddhists and the adherents of the old Bon religion may hope again to travel to their most holy site, the 6,714-metre high Kangrinboqê Peak and Lake Mapam Yumco in south-western Tibet. Thus expectations are also high for the contended territories of the ancient Jammu and Kashmir Kingdom. After World War II India, Pakistan and China had extended their grip to this empty triangle, where not only the hidden territory of Aksai-Chin between Xinjiang and Tibet has been forgotten behind the barrier of 7,000-metre high Karakorum range, but maybe also the mystic Shangri-La – the Tibetan Buddhist Paradise.

In Jammu and Kashmir, international borders were surprisingly reopened in 2006 as a humanitarian sign after the devastating earthquake in north-eastern Pakistan on 10 Oct, 2005. And by July 2006 India and China reopened the legendary Nathu La Pass at the eastern corner of the Himalayas. Across this 4,545-metre high pass in the Himalayan range the Yadong Valley, Xigazê and Lhasa are now connected again with Gangtok, Sikkim's capital, and Calcutta, the former capital of the British Indian Empire in West Bengal. For centuries, until 1962, this southern link of the 'Silk Route' had seen goods flowing from China into India and further on to Europe. Now reopened, trade has set in again with traditional goods such as flour and tea as well as sheep, goat and Yak skins, while international tourism is expected to add to the cash flow.

The development of modern transport and communication is contributing to the cross-border integration of Tibetan culture, while travel is no longer be restricted to the legendary Friendship Highway. In 1985 the border town of Kodari in Nepal at the Friendship Bridge had seen the removal of its iron-curtain, the tollgate now open to Zham, where all climbing for Tibet begins or all descents end. A colourful free trade market has meanwhile developed during the last eight years, where local residents within 30 km on both sides of the border enjoy free movement between China-Tibet and Nepal.

From there a track road is winding up to the cold highland desert of the Tibetan plateau, with two landmarks towering into the azure skies: the peaks of 8,013-metre high Shisha Pangma (Xixabangma) to the west and the 7,150-metre high Gauri Sankar to the east. The stressful journey will end at 4,300-metre high Tingri. Then halfway to the 150 km afar town of Xigazê the traveller arrives at Sakya (Sajia). This is the cradle of the 11th century Sakyapa sect and Tibet's spiritual centre during the Mongolian times, where today the finest collections of Tibetan religious relics are found. At Xigazê in the Yarlung Zangbo valley, the route diverts for Lhasa and Gyangzê. Gyangzê, known for its splendid Palkhor Monastery with a nine-tier Kumbum stupa that includes 108 chapels and over 10,000 images, meanwhile has also become the transit centre for travellers on their way from Lhasa to Yadong Valley (Chomo) and the Nathu La pass.

Arriving at Lhasa a three-fold change is experienced. Since the 1950s the image of once isolated, mystified and numinous Tibet has gone and the old capital of a God-like ruler has been turned into a sterile, nonetheless charming urban centre, which is now the capital of the Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR). The 'site of gods', as Lhasa signifies, has not lost its most striking landmarks, namely the Potala Palace, which


The Karakorum range where Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region, Pakistan and India meet.

Chemre Gompa located 40 km south of Leh.

was the residence of Tibet's spiritual leader, and the Jokhang Temple. Although by Lhasa's Gonggar airport and air links to six Chinese cities and Nepal's capital Tibet since the 1980s has been attached to the outside world, the opening of the 1,142 km railway line to Golmud in Qinghai Province in July 2006 is an important economic added value. Goods and travellers reach the heart of Tibet fast and cheap, away from Beijing only 50 hours instead of weeklong journeys on road. Thus concerns about the effects of global warming and the risks of upcoming mass tourism count little, while the secluded roof of the world promises space for adventurers profiting from new crossborder travel freedom.

Pilgrims and tourists already arrive from the skirting areas of inaccessible valleys and remote mountain regions of Qinghai, Gansu and Sichuan, in order to reach holy mount Kailash (or Kangrinboqê Peak). But tourism will also soon start from the legendary Kingdom of Mustang, which is a 2,500-metre high and 360-sq-km large Nepalese exclave ruled since 15th century by local kings. Located in the rain shadow of the Himalayas, the desert-like country is connected with Nepal through the world's deepest gorge that has been cut by the Kali Gandaki River. Weeklong journeys have once to be made by donkey and mule caravans that exported salt from Tibetan salt lakes to Pokhara and into the large north-Indian plains. A thrilling air route connects Mustang's 'Shangri-La' with the upland basin of Pokhara, where small airplanes risk extreme wind loads and also offer unforgettable views on the spectacular peaks of the 8,000-metre high Annapurna massif to the east and the Dhaulagiri to the west as well as down into the 4,000-metre deep awe-inspiring Gandaki Gorge. But all frights are forgotten when arriving in Nepal's Lumbini border province. There, near the town of Kapilavastu, Gautama Buddha was born in 563 B.C., who's teachings have found a refuge in the mesmerizing mountain world.

Beyond the beguiling Himalayas and the main water divides of Yarlung Zangbo, Sutlej and Indus rivers, the Indus valley hides 'Little Tibet'. Surrounded by the ranges of Zanskar and Ladakh this part of India's Jammu and Kashmir state was not touched by post WWII turbulences and destructions. Much of the ancient Tibetan culture has therefore been preserved there. Ladakh's capital Leh, a water rich oasis to the west of the Karakorum range, has already emerged as transit point during Tang Dynasty on the trading route from India to western Tibet and Xinjiang. This road served as western key link of the ancient southern Silk Route. The mighty Potala at Leh derives from the royal residence of the illustrious Tibetan Namgyal dynasty. Built on mount Namgyal Tsemo the palace dominates the town since 15th century and reflects the splendour of the more famous Potala in Lhasa. At present, the isolated regions of Ladakh and Leh may be reached only by air or by a gruelling, but unforgettable two days journey from Jammu & Kashmirs's capital Shrinagar. But soon, Leh together with the other fortified Ladakhi towns and monasteries of former Tibetan rulers, such as Choglamsar, Shey or Tikze, may be reconnected to their ancient Tibetan homeland. The dream of Greater Tibet, where the land of Shangri-La is hidden.

Travel Tips

There are -

- Daily morning flights from Srinagar to Leh with Indian Airlines; Srinagar is also connected with Delhi by a dozen of daily flights;
- Six times a week Air China flies from Chengdu and Kathmandu to Lhasa;
- Direct flights from Hong Kong and Shanghai to Kathmandu;
- Regular daily flights between Kathmandu and Pokhara; &
- Chartered and regular flights from Pokhara to Jomsom.

Websites that are helpful:

1. http://www.travel-himalayas.com/about.html
2. http://www.accesstibettour.com/travel-essentials.html
3. http://www.ladakh-tourism.com/tours/indus-valley-trek.html

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Helan Mountains

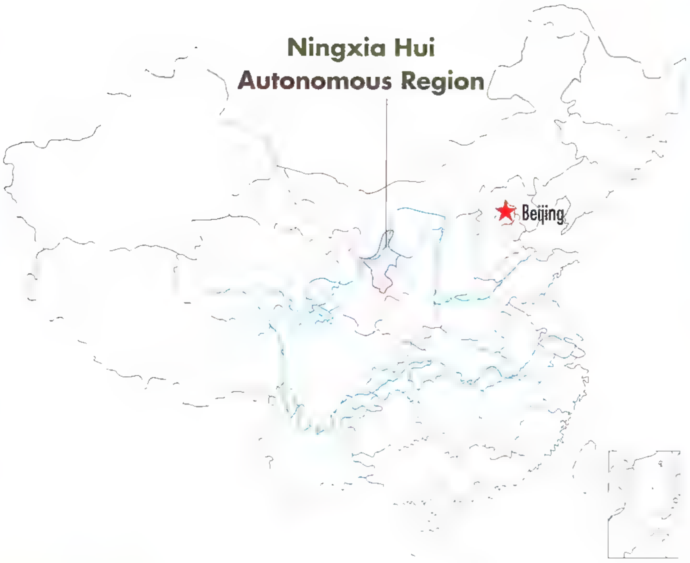
Nature's Great Wall

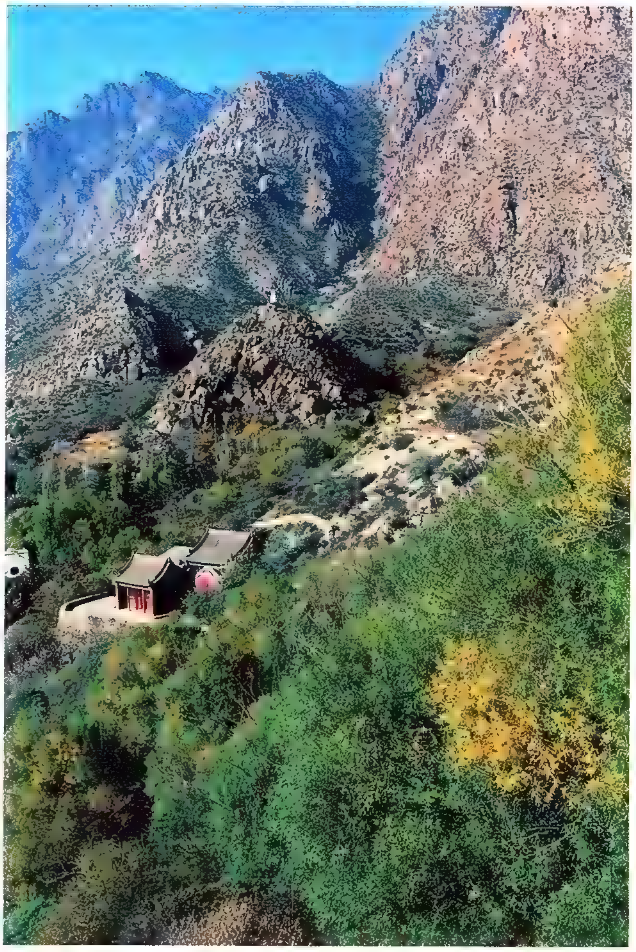
Photos & Article • Shi Baoxiu

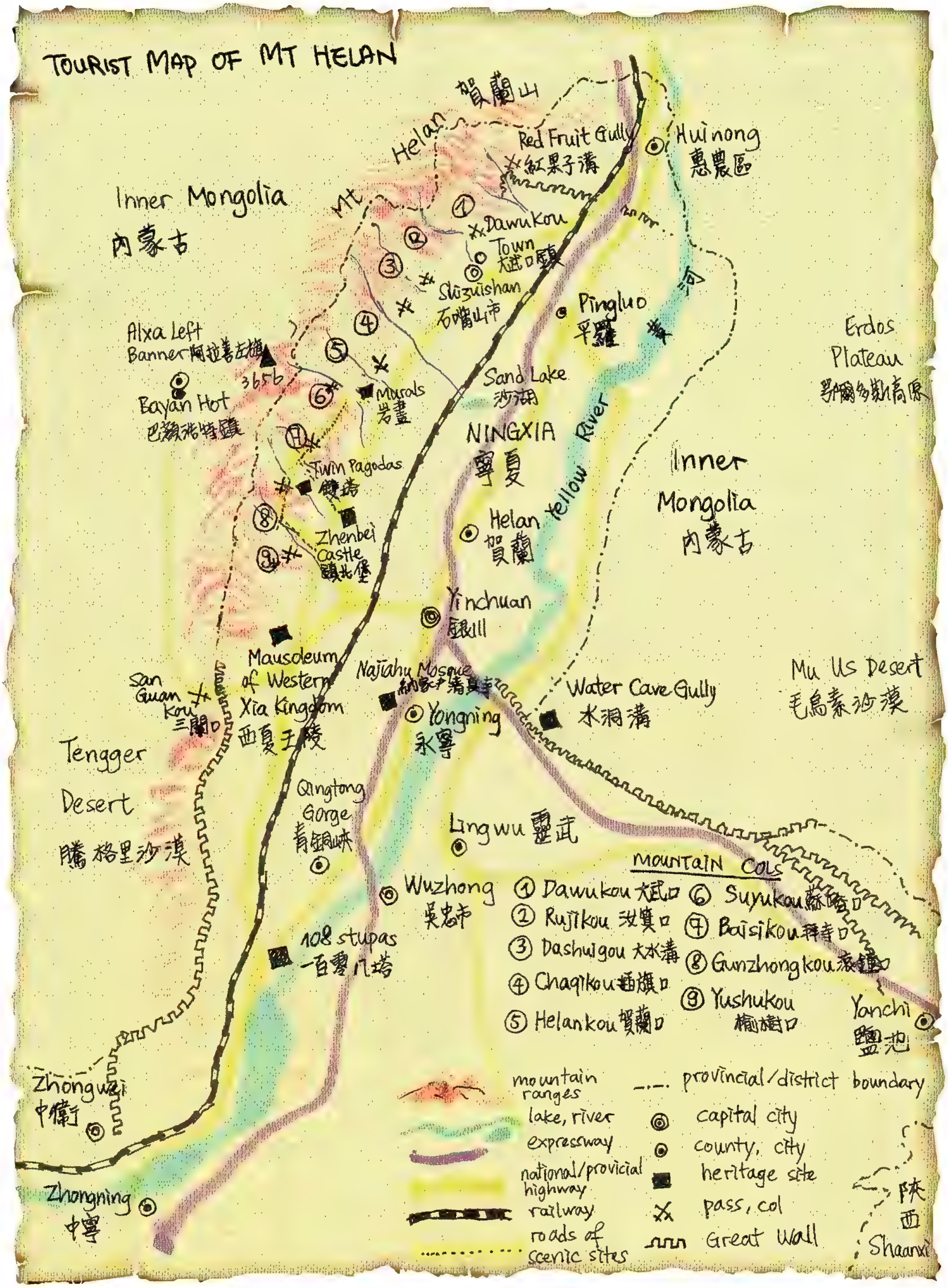
Situated in the Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region, the Helan Mountains were often the site of bloody wars between Central China and invaders then outside the ancient national boundary. These high, imposing mountains were an effective natural barrier against enemy troops. Yue Fei (1101—1141), a patriotic general of the royal Southern Song empire, expressed his desire to protect the country at the Helan mountain pass in his most famous poem, Man Jiang Hong (滿江紅 Entirely Red River).

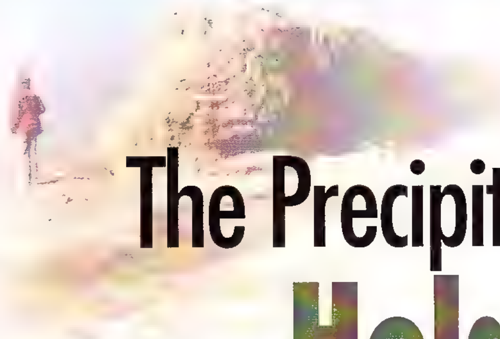
Getting to Know Mt Helan

The Helan Mountains start southwards at Mt Bayan Gol in the territory of Wuhai City, Inner Mongolia, which is near the Ulan Buh Desert, and ends at Mt Huabu in Zhongwei, Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region; in the west, it approaches the Tengger Desert. The whole range of the mountains extends over 200 km from north to south, with the width of its broadest parts more than 50 km, and the narrowest merely 15 km. The Helan Mountains is not only a watershed for the Yellow River drainage area and the inland river valleys, but also a boundary range between Ningxia and the Alxa Banner League of Inner Mongolia. Interestingly, the mountains rise very slowly on the Alxa side, which just look like some hills in the desert, but lift abruptly in the Yinchuan Plain on the Ningxia side, rarely with any transitional zones.



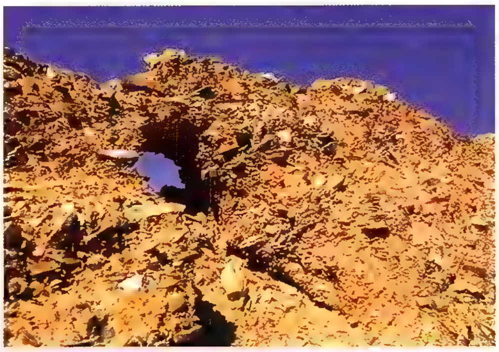



TOURIST MAP OF MT HELAN
Mt Helan 賀蘭山
Red Fruit Gully 紅果子溝
Huinong 惠農區
Inner Mongolia 內蒙古
Dawukou
Town 大武口鎮
Shizuishan 石嘴山市
Pingluo 平羅
黃河
Erdos Plateau 鄂爾多斯高原
Alxa Left Banner 阿拉善左旗
3656
Bayan Hot 巴顏浩特鎮
Murals 岩畫
Sand Lake 沙湖
NINGXIA 寧夏
Yellow River
Twin Pagodas 雙塔
Zhenbei Castle 鎮北堡
Helan 賀蘭
Inner Mongolia 內蒙古
Yinchuan 銀川
Mausoleum of Western Xia Kingdom 西夏王陵
Najiahu Mosque 納家戶清真寺
San Guan Kou 三關口
Water Cave Gully 水洞溝
Mu Us Desert 毛烏素沙漠
Yongning 永寧
Tengger Desert 騰格里沙漠
Qingtong Gorge 青銅峽
Lingwu 靈武
Wuzhong 吳忠市
108 stupas 一百零八塔
Yanchi 鹽池
Zhongwei 中衛
Zhongning 中寧
MOUNTAIN COLS
① Dawukou 大武口
② Rujikou 汝箕口
③ Dashuigou 大水溝
④ Chaqikou 插旗口
⑤ Helankou 賀蘭口
⑥ Suyukou 蘇峪口
⑦ Baisikou 拜寺口
⑧ Gunzhongkou 滾鐘口
⑨ Yushukou 榆樹口
mountain ranges
lake, river
expressway
national/provicial highway
railway
roads of scenic sites
provincial/district boundary
capital city
county, city
heritage site
pass, col
Great Wall
陝西 Shaanxi



The Precipitous Helan Mountains

Relying on the Helan Mountains as a natural barrier, Central China's rulers only had to erect fortresses at the cols to repel invaders — for Helan is a permanent, natural Great Wall.



In October 2006, I travelled to the Ningxia Hui Minority's Autonomous Region to delve into the history of the Helan Mountains and seek out traces of the military forts that once stood there. I also wanted to explore the Yinchuan plain, which is nourished by the Yellow River and protected by the Helan Mountains that follow the great bend of that mighty waterway.

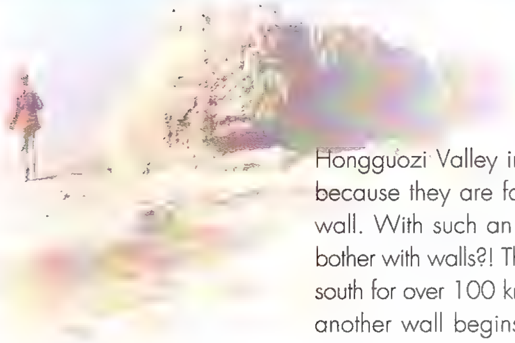
Overnight my train climbed from Xi'an, at an altitude of about 200 metres, to the Ningxia Plateau, at 1,300 metres. I stepped out of the railway station in Yinchuan, capital of the Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region, at 6:30 the next morning into the dim light of dawn. As my bus left the new downtown area, a flaming red sun leapt up from the horizon, spreading its rays and rapidly heating the chill air. In the land of Xingqing, former capital of the ancient Western Xia kingdom, the sun was still as arrogant and menacing as it had been for the Dangxiang people over 1,000 years earlier.

I quickly left Yinchuan and the old downtown area to head towards the desert in the west and the Helan Mountains. I spent 10 days in the mountains. Every day, I travelled through the valleys and gorges and climbed many peaks looking for the passes that Yue Fei wanted to seize back in his time - places where fortress walls and beacon-fire stations once stood — and just soaked up the history.

Stronger than the Great Wall There's something very interesting on a distribution map of the Great Wall of the Ming Dynasty. The Great Wall approaches the Yellow River at Lingwu in Ningxia as it extends from Dingbian in Shaanxi Province into Ningxia. And then, the extending line utilizes the river as a defensive barrier in place of man-made walls. Only to the north, beyond Shizuishan City, is there a section of wall running west to east, which would have prevented the Mongolian Wala tribe from invading. This wall disappears when it reaches

1. The high mountains lacked adequate soil to build walls, so scree was mixed with earth.

2. The Hongguozi Valley fortresses were defences against Mongolian armies on horseback.



Hongguozi Valley in the Helan Mountains, simply because they are far more impregnable than any wall. With such an imposing natural barrier, why bother with walls?! The fortification-free zone stretches south for over 100 km until Sanguankou Pass, where another wall begins. This part of the Great Wall extends further south, passing through Qingtongxia Gorge where the Yellow River runs through it, and on to Zhongwei. After that, it turns west to follow the southern edge of the Tengger Desert and then enters the Gansu Corridor. It then ends abruptly at Jiayuguan Pass in Jiuquan. The Great Wall of the Ming Dynasty extends for almost 500 km in North China. Apart from the fortification-free section at the Yellow River, it tapers off about 100 km into the Helan Mountains and gives way to a trusting dependence on nature.

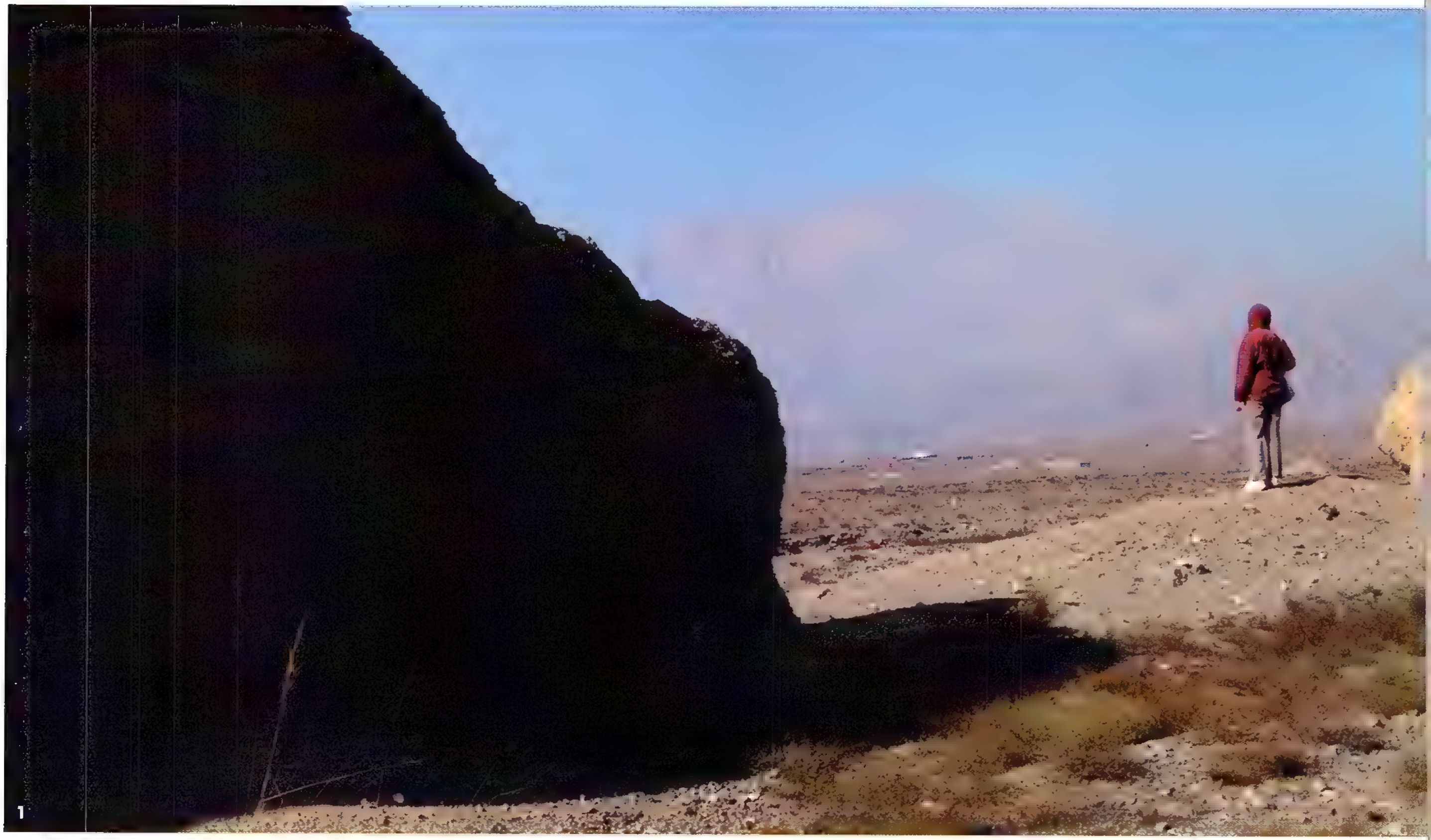
Hongguozi Valley

My bus arrived at the Huinong District of Shizuishan in the very north of Ningxia. Near this former old downtown area chemical plants have been releasing poisonous fumes into the air, prompting the municipal government office to move to Dawukou Pass 30 km to the south.

As mentioned, at this point the Great Wall extends from east to west right up to the ridge of Hongguozi (Red Fruit) Valley, my intended destination. All the taxi drivers waiting at the long-distance bus station knew of the valley. I was whisked there in under than 20 minutes for a mere 15 yuan. My taxi driver stopped before a section of ruined wall in Hongguozi Town. Pointing at it, the plump gentleman identified it as the Northern Great Wall. I could not believe my eyes. The Great Wall, such a solid, commanding presence on the map, had deteriorated greatly.

Solo Sojourn When I stopped to ask for directions, a villager standing there alongside National Highway 109 pointed to the Helan Mountains in the west, saying: 'The Wall is so long that it reaches the foot of the mountains. But there is no path leading there, and I'm afraid you won't be able to reach it on foot.' Undeterred, I started my journey.

This part of the Great Wall remains fairly intact, and seldom breaks except for a gap when it passes through Qianhegou Valley. Like a snake, the earthen wall winds its way and gradually rises to conform to the mountainous terrain, shaped during the Glacial Period. My progress was slow as I negotiated scree and rocky sections. What little wild grass grew was patchy, and there was not a single tree providing shade. The early morning temperature had been cool enough, but as soon as the sun rose above the horizon, the heat bore down. By 10 a.m. I was roasting. Sweat gushed from my pores, but the air was so dry, it quickly evaporated. My mouth was equally dry and I became extremely thirsty. My lips began to chap. Looking ahead I could make out the beacon-fire station far up on the ridge. I clambered up on to the Great Wall and started walking along it,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which made things much easier as it is level and more than a metre wide. A coating of silvery sand from the surrounding desert crunched beneath my feet. At first, I felt a bit dizzy walking this way some three to four metres above the ground. But after 100 metres or so, I adjusted. After about two kilometres, I saw two sheep pens tight against the wall. The shepherds were clever; they knew the Great Wall served as a screen against bad weather and wolves.

Seismic Shift, Unbeatable Barrier For the next two kilometres the scene remained the same, with plenty of desert all around, but the Great Wall itself changed considerably. At first, it began to climb the slopes, but then the loess, sand and rocky debris was instantly replaced by stone. Suddenly, I came upon some wire netting wrapped around a section of stone wall. Before I set out, Master Wu, a teacher at the Ningxia University, had told me about a 'shifted' section of Great Wall at Hongguozi Valley. And here it was, with its fractures and loose bits bound by the netting, having moved about a third of a metre north.

What awesome power had shifted such a huge, heavy section of stone wall?! Some scholars believe it was an earthquake, while others speculate that the ground simply collapsed beneath it. There is no definitive answer, but one thing is certain: nature was responsible. No amount of human strength could have done this.

War was brutal in the Ming Dynasty, 500 years ago. Armies on horseback fought with arrows, knives and spears. At that time, the Mongolians were expert at combat on horseback. Down on the plain, the Ming Dynasty troops — former peasants — would normally be no match for them. But when confronted with the areas

1. The Great Wall was extended across the broad plain between the Yellow River and the Helan Mountains.

2. Walls in Hongguozi Valley kept back invading Mongolians.

ridges, trenches or high walls, the Mongolian cavalry were stuck; their horses could not climb such barriers like monkeys, nor were they themselves any good at fighting on foot. These lofty walls successfully hindered enemies for hundreds of years.

A Long Way from Home At noon I was completely alone, trudging along the slopes where the Great Wall wound its way up and down. In the alluvial fan plain below, a gentle slope stretched towards a chemical factory some five kilometres away. Then I noticed the thousands upon thousands of desolate tombs. This surprising scene brought to mind the officers and their men who had been garrisoned in the Helan Mountains. Every invasion would result in some deaths, and those killed would be buried nearby, far from their hometowns.

By the time I passed through all the new and old tombs covering the mountainside and the fields and returned to the highway, it was 2 p.m. After a simple meal at the roadside, I hailed a passing bus and continued south along the highway on my way to finding the next Helan mountain pass.

Dawukou Valley

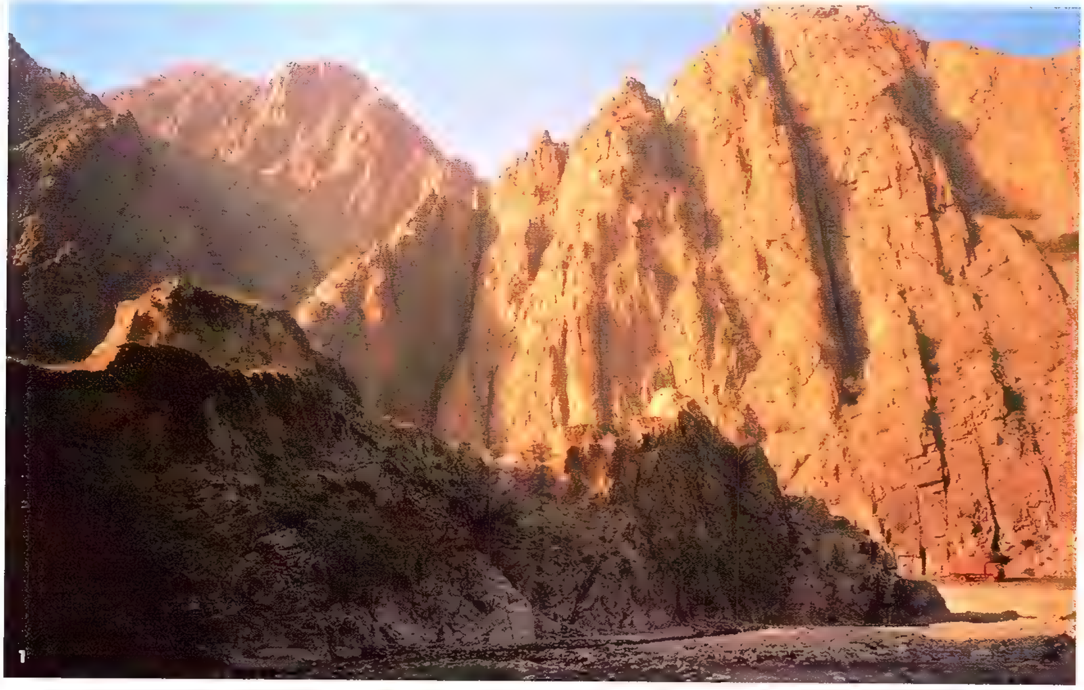
I came upon more Ming-dynasty fortifications, like those found in Hongguozi Valley, at Dawukou about five kilometres north of the urban area. It was easy to recognize Dawukou because there is a famous Northern Wudang Temple at the entrance to the valley. Dawukou Valley is much longer and broader than the Hongguozi. At the narrower sections, some high walls and beacon-fire stations had been established to hold off the horseback armies of minority peoples in the north. Evening fell just as I returned from the Northern Wudang Temple.

Rujikou Valley

Early next morning, I headed south again, reaching an entrance to Guitougou Valley after a 10-km journey. Some distance from the highway a signal-fire station stood atop a hill at the other side of the entrance to Rujikou Valley another 15-km on. As I approached the entrance, an endless convoy of huge trucks carrying loads of charcoal rumbled noisily out of the valley. Rujikou Valley has a mine that produces high-quality blind coals that give off more heat. In China they are known as Taixi charcoal. Less than two kilometres into the valley, the ground suddenly rises to create precipitous cliff walls piercing the sky. Another five kilometres on, another section of Ming-dynasty wall can be seen on the ridge at a strategic gorge entrance.

Dashui Valley

Dashui (Great Water) Valley is about 10 km south of the entrance to Rujikou Valley. As its name suggests, the water flow from this valley is enormous. By taxi, I followed a road along the Dashui River and reached an entrance into the mountains, only to be stopped by an iron fence. A swarthy, tough-looking man stood watch at the entrance, while nearby a bulletin proclaimed: 'No one is allowed into the Helan Mountains Natural Protection Zone without prior special approval, on either public or personal business.' I phoned Master Wu in Yinchuan for help. Before long, the heads of the Natural Protection Zone approved my visit, but when I returned the watchman was nowhere around. Without a key, my approval



1. Rujikou Fortress took advantage of this precipitous gorge, eliminating the need for complex fortifications.

2. A former peasant dwelling in the Helan Mountains is now a holiday country villa.

3. Blue sheep abound in the Helan Mountains thanks to a hunting ban.

4. Green pines flourish on the north side of Suyukou Pass.

was useless and I had great difficulty finding him.

Ancient Security Measures I entered Dashui Valley by following the tumultuous river. After the first kilometre, I saw an imposing wall lying in the valley ahead, with one end high on a steep cliff and the other approaching the churning river. The cliffs on the other side of the river were even higher. The walls of these forts had well been preserved and were almost completely intact except for an opening made when a highway was built to develop military factories in the valley.

Four conspicuous defensive platforms extended out from the sides of the Great Wall along the 500-metre long Dashui Valley section. The appearance of so many of these enhanced defence structures over such a relatively short span indicates the pass' significance. From deep within the valley, I walked for 10 km towards the watershed in the Helan Mountains. During this trek I began to realize that Dashui Valley was not only long but also broad. There were no further barriers to prevent enemies from attacking once they had cleared the watershed, so fortifications had to be strengthened to protect against invasion.

1

Suyukou Pass

I continued south. Once over Baisikou Pass, the trip to Suyukou Pass is about six kilometres. Now a forest park, the pass sells tickets for entry to the mountains. From the entrance, the path into the mountains extends for 15 km. Just beyond an extremely high gorge the broad valley spreads out beneath a ring of several-kilometre tall peaks. The green pines covering the mountains were a rarity; I had seldom seen any trees, much less woods, since entering the Helan Mountains.

An artificial waterfall and a square with marble steps had been built on one side of the valley, along with some cable car stations, holiday country villas and hotels. But these vulgar structures clashed with the natural beauty of the mountains and waters. Taking a

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cable car to the summit, visitors sail over the tops of the pines to the sound of the wind soughing through them, the trilling of titmice and the hoarse cawing of crows. In the deep tranquil valley, however, other trees grew as well. Their leaves had turned autumn reds, oranges and yellows, their colours intensified against the background of green pines. I stayed at a country villa that night.

Early next morning, another blue sky greeted me. The mountains loom over the deep valley so that the sun does not appear until 9 a.m. I took a taxi to Suyukou Pass and turned right for Gunzhongkou Pass.

Gunzhongkou Pass

A Rare Religious Retreat Gunzhongkou Pass should be the nearest Helan Mountain pass to Yinchuan city; the locals call it Xiaokouzi (Small Opening). The broad valley, surrounded by mountains on three sides, gets its name from its shape, which resembles the iron bells found in Buddhist temples. A lone hill, Mt Zhongling (Bell), stands at the centre of the flat valley. With its proximity to the city, its low, flat valley, tranquil atmosphere and many springs, Gunzhongkou Pass seemed to naturally attract religious communities. After the Ming Dynasty gained control of the land west of the Helan Mountains, many Buddhist and Taoist temples were built here. Buddhist temples include Helan Temple, which mimics the rising mountains, along with Dabei Temple and Guanglong Temple. The sparse Taoist temples are located in Gouxian and Shankou, including Laojun Hall, Doutian Palace, Xiaodongtian Temple, Guandi Temple and the Yuwang Platform. Interestingly, a very special mosque sits just below Helan Temple. It is actually the tomb of dignitary Ma Lunding who came from Arabian Yemen. Said to have arrived in China at the end of the 16th century, he preached for over 30 years in and around Yinchuan. The cave in which he practised his faith is in the mountainside near the bottom of Gunzhongkou Valley. It is rare and wonderful that three such different

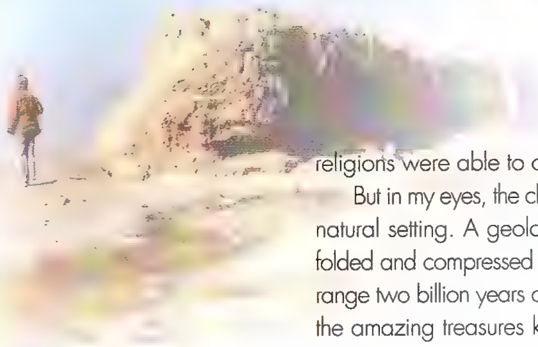
1. Granite boulders on Mt Lotus.

2. An imam talks about dignitary Ma Xuding at the cave, deep in the mountainside of Gunzhongkou Pass, where the Yemen practised his religion.

3. This Taoist master at Helan Temple is in his 80s.

4. A granite precipice in Dasigou Valley.

5. Mosses grow on granite shaped some 1.7 billion years ago.



religions were able to co-exist peacefully together.

But in my eyes, the charm of Gunzhongkou Pass is its natural setting. A geological process called orogeny folded and compressed the land to create this mountain range two billion years ago. Among its odd shapes are the amazing treasures known as the Helan Sapphire, composed of a kind of purple and green clay slate considered top quality for crafting. The Helan inkstones, made of Helan Sapphire, are among the most famous handcrafted artworks in China.

The LuLiang Orogeny, which occurred about 1.7 billion years ago, created broad fissures when the Helan Mountains rose up, and the magma deep under the crust gushed through the gaps, shaping the granite peaks that now thrust up towards the sky. The granite peaks between today's Gunzhongkou Pass and Huangqigou Valley were formed this way.

Dasigou Valley

Early next morning, I travelled to Dasigou Valley. Heading down to the valley from one side of a highway bridge, I took a detour at the bottom of the gorge, but my way was blocked by a broken cliff. Visitors must climb over this to continue on. On the north side of the valley natural granite poles thrust at the sky, some of them taller than a 10-storey building, and all of them smooth, without any cracks.

The south side was largely made up of sedimentary rock. As I climbed the slopes, the ground under my feet was covered with scree. On the ridge, I also saw bare broken cliffs that looked just like brick walls, with tidily piled brick-like rocks. Nature has created some curious and stunning landscapes in the Helan Mountains.

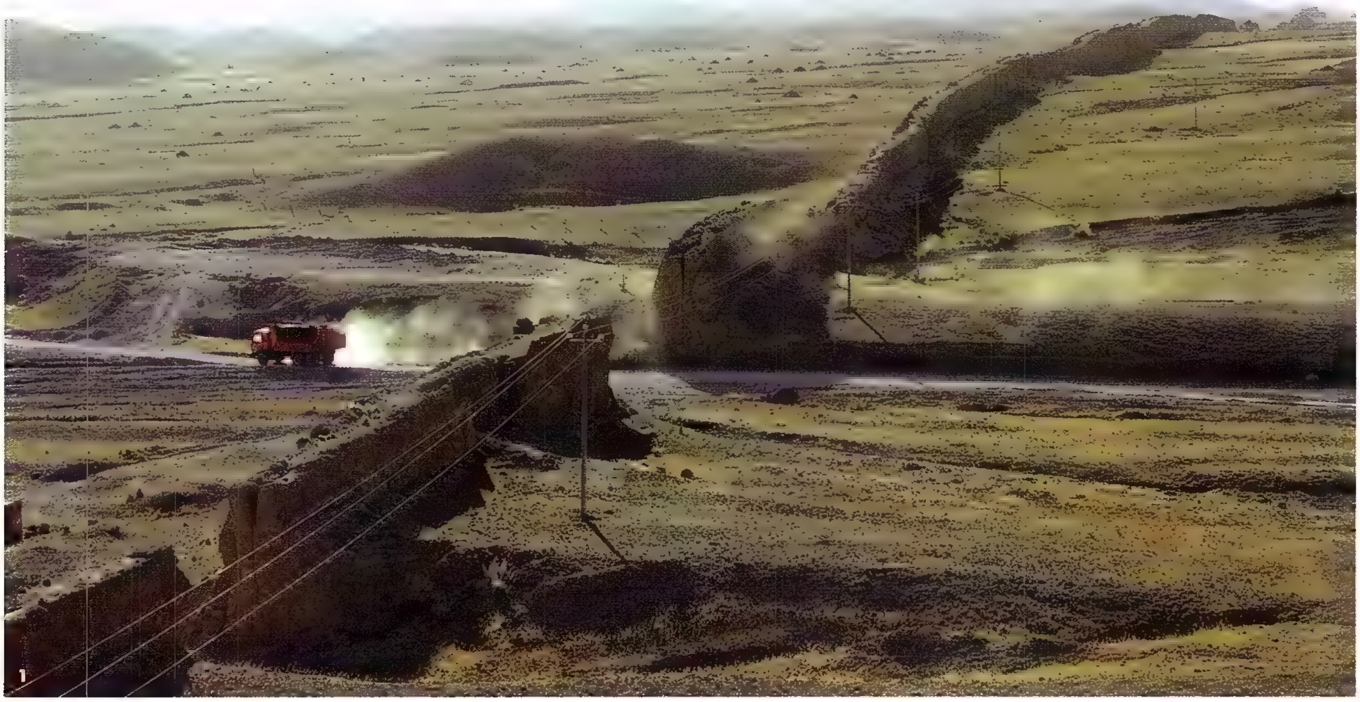
Safe in the Mountains I chatted with Sun Li that evening after returning to the administrative office. He said Dasigou was the longest valley in Gunzhongkou Pass, leading all the way to Inner Mongolia west of the Helan Mountains. But the journey would be difficult because it would involve going over the watershed. At the deepest part of the valley, there are still many ruined walls and the foundations of temples, amidst a scattering of bricks and tiles that might date back to the Ming Dynasty.

Throughout history, the Helan Mountains have been a double-edged sword regarding military treatises and alliances. Such things might benefit both the Han people and their enemies, or they might do equal harm to both; it depended on who had the initiative hand. Only by controlling the Helan Mountains, garrisoning their troops at each pass and setting up strong, rigorous military bases, could the Han guarantee the security of the Yinchuan Plain and reassure the emperors faraway.

I continued working my way through the Helan Mountains in search of more passes. On the approach to Yinchuan, the mountains become loftier and steeper, and more passes appear — Chaqikou, Helankou, Suyukou, Gunzhongkou, Huangqikou, Gangou Valley, Yushugou Valley, Sanguankou and so forth. During the Ming Dynasty, forts were established at each pass or valley to repel the

1. The south section of the Chimuguan Great Wall extends for 100 li to Qingtongxia Gorge, as here the Helan Mountains become gentle hills providing no natural barrier to ancient invaders.

2. The north section of the Chimuguan Great Wall winds its way up into the high mountains and stops abruptly at the summit. (by Chan Yat Nin)



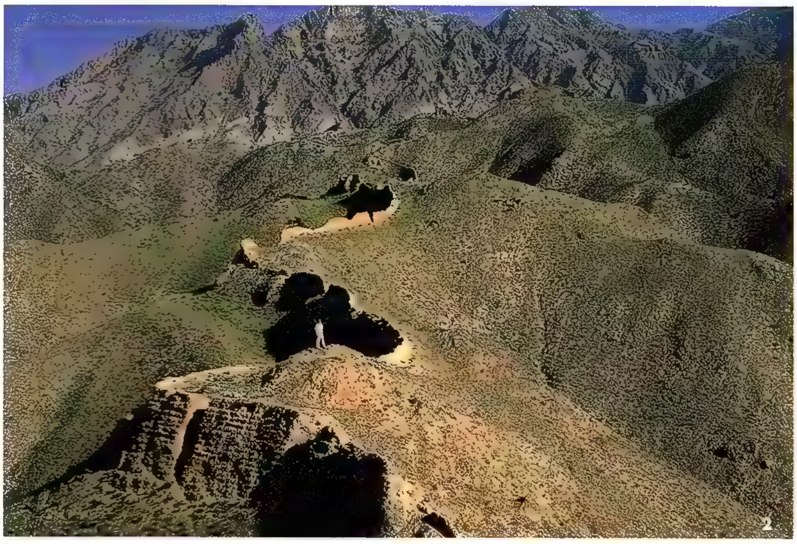
nomadic peoples of the north who might climb the Helan Mountains to launch sneak attacks. The fortifications varied depending upon the shape of the surrounding mountains. The higher the mountains, the simpler the defences could be. Nearer to the main peak of the Helan Mountains, the valleys and passes are all naturally high, steep, deep and complicated, thus it was not necessary to make too great a defensive effort, except at Sanguankou Pass.

Sanguankou Pass

Past Red Wood Pass According to the Records of Chimukou Pass, more than 30 fortified passes in the Helan Mountains stretched for some 250 km. Among these, Shenjinguan Pass, Chimu (Red Wood) Pass, Dakaikou Pass and Zhenyuanguan Pass were known as the city's four weakest points of defence, with Chimu Pass being especially vulnerable. Chimu Pass, now called Sanguankou Pass, is about 40 km west of Yinchuan. As the broadest pass through which the nomads from west of the Helan Mountains might enter the Yinchuan Plain, its defences had concerned the emperors of the Ming Dynasty most, especially Emperor Jiaqing. In the 10th year (1531) of his reign, an 80-km section of the Great Wall was built from Dabapu Fort at Qingtongxia Gorge all the way to Sanguankou Pass. Nine years later, this part of the Great Wall was rebuilt because it had been buried under sand blown by high winds. Another section climbing up the mountain was built north of the pass. In the 36th year (1557) of the Jiaqing Regime, the Chimu Pass walls were rebuilt once again, and the first, second and third passes were established, giving Sanguankou Pass its name.

South of the Great Wall When I arrived at the second pass, the best preserved of the three, I found a gap in the imposing fortress wall by the Yinchuan-Bayan Road. Seasonal flooding of the normally dry riverbeds had destroyed sections of up to 200 metres, leaving a mere 20-metre fragment to brave the desolate autumn winds. South of the second fortress wall, the Helan Mountains become gentler and the natural defensive qualities are diminished. So the Great Wall reappears on the near sides of the mountains. This section zigzags south for about 100 km to Dabapu Fort west of Qingtongxia Gorge. It then leaves the Helan Mountains, passes through Nanchangtan (Southern Long Beach) in Zhongwei County, enters Jingyuan, Gansu Province, turns into the Gansu Corridor and comes to an end at Jiayuguan Town.

To the Summit North of the second pass, the fortress wall wends its difficult way along steep cliffs and zigzagging ridges, then disappears at the very tops of the peaks, which only blue sheep and musk deer can reach. Gasping, I climbed up to a ridge north of the pass from where I could see the fortress wall that frontier officers and solders of the Ming Dynasty had painstakingly built with rock and earth. The soldiers built the basements with rock from the mountains and topped these with walls of tamped earth. The earth was impure, however, containing all manner of grit. This alone suggests that the project must have been extremely difficult. Not only did water have to be carried up to the summit, but then great mounds of earth had to be shouldered up the steep ridges as well. It made me think of an old saying: 'Quality iron should not be shaped into nails, and a worthy man should not be a soldier'. A nail hammered into a piece of wood can hardly be disengaged; likewise, a solder not only risks his life in combat, but also has to shoulder many other difficult burdens.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Making my along the earthen wall, I arrived at the edge of a cliff. In the direction of Yinchuan in the distance, the lowly hills were covered in fog, and what was once the first pass would have been hidden behind several peaks. But the first pass no longer exists. Far beyond the mountains are the mausoleums of emperors Taizu and Taizong of the Xiaxia Kingdom; the Ningxia refer to them as the Double Mausoleums.

Today's Helan Mountains have gradually become less important as a natural barrier in modern warfare tactics, but a lot of Chinese troops are still garrisoned there. Planes continually take off and land from a fighter plane base below the Helan Mountains, and tank troops frequently conduct drills in the surrounding desert areas. Knowing I had visited the Helan Mountains, a friend who had served in the army in Ningxia 30 years ago told me proudly that many mountains had been hollowed out to make way for military bases and that he himself had helped with the digging.

Translated by Huang Deyuan

Ancient Fortress,
Modern Soundstage

The ancient fortress below the Helan Mountains, where troops used to be garrisoned, disappeared with the wars of old. But the area is active again...

After several days, my legs were sore from all that trekking through the mountains and along the Great Wall. I even found it difficult to walk up the stairs at the Gulou Restaurant in Yincuan. So I decided to stay on level ground and visit Zhenbeipu Fortress.

Reconstruction Drama

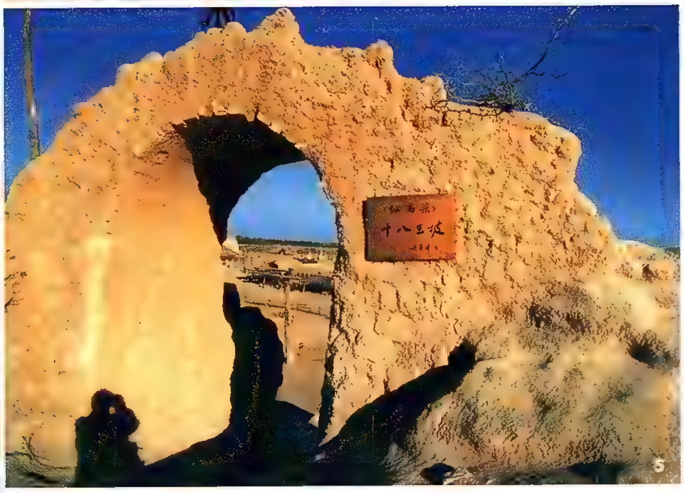
This fortress is said to have been built in 1500 during the Ming Dynasty to accommodate troops as part of the fortified network of sections of the Great Wall in the Helan Mountains. Around the third year of the Qianlong Regime in the Qing Dynasty, a fierce earthquake hit Ningxia, destroying not only the Ningxia Prefecture Office (Xingqing Mansion during the West Xia Reign) and nearly every house in the rural areas, but also decimating the otherwise solid Zhenbeipu fortress. Two years later, the new fortress was built to the north in today's very much intact Zhenbeipu Fortress. The ruined walls that appear in Zhang Yimou's film *Red Sorghum* are none other than the fortress relics from the Ming Dynasty.

Exotic Edifices

These fortress relics were once all that remained out here, but thanks to Zhang Xianliang, a well-known writer in China, the area has been developed into a movie studio backlot. All manner of backdrops and stylized buildings, from lush private residences, offices and a hostel to contesting platforms, military camps and huts cover the area. What were once sheep pens in the 1980s have been replaced with a long street of traditional taverns, Tibetan structures, tyrants' lairs, retired officials' mansions and merchants' houses. A film crew can rent, or build, whatever sort of structure their story requires. Afterwards, they leave the structures behind, attracting tourists and fans of their films. Zhenbeipu has become quite a lively place.

The Wrangler was the first film shot here more than 20 years ago, but since then another 80 movies and TV shows have been filmed here, including *Red Sorghum, The Wooden Man's Bride, Red River Valley, Dragon Inn, Ashes of Time* and *A Chinese Odyssey*, as well as the Hong Kong production *Dance of Passion*. Many have received awards, Zhang's *Red Sorghum*, Wong Kar Wai's *Ashes of Time* and Jeffery Lau's *A Chinese Odyssey* among them.

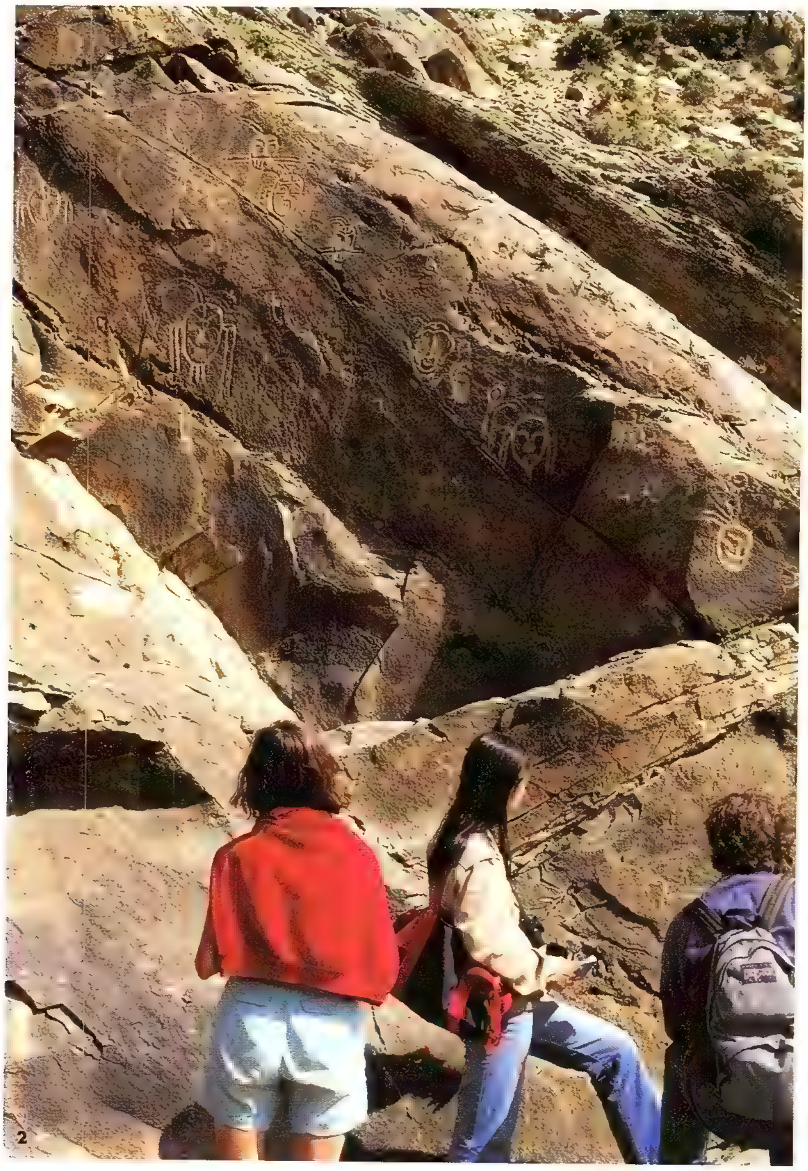
1. Today's Zhenbeipu resembles a prosperous ancient town.
2. Zhenbeipu Fortress, just below the Helan Mountains, played a key role in safeguarding the mountain passes.
3. Tourists visit Zhenbeipu daily.
4. Props and settings can be altered according to the plot.
5. The earthen arch Shibali (9-km) Slope built for director Zhang Yimou's movie Red Sorghum.
6. Zhenbeipu is now a thriving film backlot.



Cliff Etchings

A Gem in Helankou Pass

A watershed between Ningxia and Inner Mongolia, the Helan Mountains were a hub for many ancient nomadic groups. In their constant pastoral migrations these peoples left behind traces of their lives, including cliff paintings.



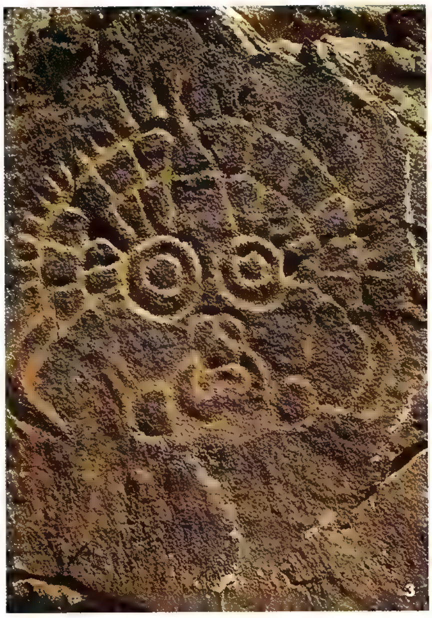
Leaving boisterous Zhenbeipu, we headed west. The road climbed uphill some 10 km as we moved over the alluvial plain created by the glaciers of the Helan Mountains.

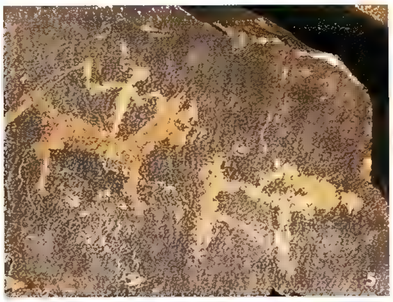
Writing on the Wall

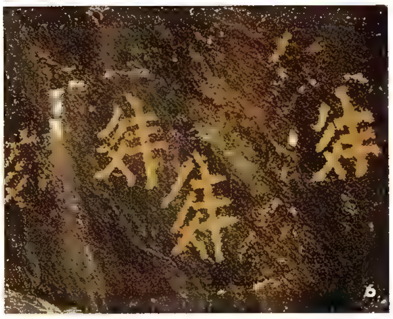
Helankou, known for its dense distribution of cliff paintings, lies 20 km north of Baisikou via the Helan Mountains. As early as the Southern and Northern Dynasties (420—589), Li Daoyuan (472—527), geographer and essayist of the Northern Wei Dynasty (386—534), visited the Helan Mountain area. His work Commentary on the Waterways Classic (*Shui Jing Zhu* 水經註) records the cliff paintings. The book describes the scope of 'Huashishan' (painting rock mountain), on the east slope of the northern section of the Helan Mountains.

However, Li Daoyuan's survey findings were ignored for some 1,500 years, until the cliff paintings were discovered again by accident. In the autumn of 1983, the Ningxia Museum archaeology team followed the footsteps of Li Daoyuan to survey the Helan Mountains. To their surprise, they found cliff paintings in 22 valleys. In Helankou, the villagers of Jinshan Village in Helan County were all descendants of nomads who had lived there with the cliff painting for generations. They did not consider them rare. Calling them huashitou, or 'scratched rocks', they left them alone. They believed the cliff paintings were inscriptions passed down from remote antiquity and must be mysterious things related to the gods, heaven and fate.

According to the experts' survey, there are altogether 3,200 cliff paintings inside and outside Helankou. Of these, more than 780 were of human







heads or weirdly shaped variations. Their style is highly imaginative. The lines are quite clear. The most famous is the 'Sun God', which was etched on the mountain slope. The eyes, each outlined with two full concentric circles, stare at the viewer. The eyelids, forehead and top of the head bear radiating lines. The skill reflected in this inscription is masterly; it is a gem among the cliff paintings in the Helan Mountain area. Cliff paintings also depict such wild animals as the deer, wolf, tiger, boar, wild buffalo, horse, sheep, camel, snake and hawk. It can be assumed that the artists were ancient hunting tribesmen. Inscriptions of men and women, riders on horseback, children and pregnant women are also plentiful, as are etchings of ancient tools and weaponry, carriage wheels and carriages, evidence that the artists' civilization was quite developed. Other cliff paintings include handprints, footprints, the sun, the moon, stars and clouds. Some depict life's activities, such as hunting parties, grazing the herds, dancing, sexual intercourse and fights.

Reflections of Ancient Life

A closer look at the inscriptions and depictions reveals many differences in style and method. Some scholars believe it would have been difficult to make the etchings on the granite surfaces without some sort of iron tools. Ironware is known to have been in use in China in the Eastern Zhou (770—256 B.C.) and Spring & Autumn Periods (770—476 B.C.). In the latter era, the Rong and Di ethnic groups lived in the Helan Moutains. Rong and Di are collective addresses for nomadic ethnic groups in Northwest and North China, respectively. They were enemies of the Qin State, which later united China, and the ancestors of the Qiang ethnic group. In the Warring States Period (403—221 B.C.), the Helan Mountains became the territory of the Huns, who continually harassed the Qin State. In the Han Dynasty (206—219), the Huns broke up and the North Huns migrated to other parts of the Steppe. After the Huns, the Wuhuan, Xianbei, Turks, Khitans, Tanguts and Mongols — all nomadic tribes — took turns assaulting the north and northwest frontiers of the Han. They all contributed to the inscriptions of hunting, grazing, cavalry battles, religious rituals and other aspects of life on the Helan Mountains.

Compared with the rather stiff, conservative and busy Han people, the nomadic tribesmen were born romantics. They practically lived on horseback, loved singing and dancing, and were good cliff carvers. During idle moments, they started scratching images on the rocks. With a piece of ironware and a pebble, they would hammer pictures into the mountain rock.

Graffiti vs History

When I revisited Helankou again after 15 years, I found everything had changed. The unsophisticated but lovely Jinshan Village had lost its former charm. The shepherding villagers had been relocated. Newly constructed farmhouses, dubbed 'Farmhouse Fun' for tourists, had replaced the village. But these 'farmhouses' were by no means the humble structures of men and women who work the land — they were chic hotels. A brand new modern tourist centre stood at the narrow entrance to the valley in sharp contrast to, and in conflict with, the primordial cliff paintings. The worst part was that some rare cliff paintings now bore the names of tourists who had scribbled on the rock in pen or pencil. Others had begun to peel off due to weathering or damage by thieves when the place was not yet properly guarded more than a decade earlier. Reforestation had also been introduced! It was kind of a 'sentimental' damage, so to speak.

1. This handprint might be an etching of the artist's own hand.

2. The Helan Mountains were home to the Hun, Xianbei, Turk, Khitan and other nomadic tribes throughout history. Cliff paintings reflect their lives and customs. (by Tai Chi Yin)

3. The famous 'Sun God' painting.

4. Artistic and imaginative cliff paintings. (by Tai Chi Yin)

5. Horse riding and hunting activities are typical etchings. (by Adam Wong)

6. Rare Tangut characters left on the Helan Mountains. (by Tai Chi Yin)

Yinchuan A Rich Plain

The capital city of Ningxia, Yinchuan glows in Muslim colours and is also a fertile land known as the 'South China of the North'.

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The Yellow River runs parallel to the Helan Mountains; sandwiched between the mountain range and the river is the famous Yinchuan Plain.

The name Yinchuan speaks for itself. *Yin* ('silver') is a synonym for 'ample produce and natural blessings', whereas *chuan* ('plain') is short for alluvial plain among the people of the Loess Plateau. The river rumbles down from the Qinghai-Tibet Plateau via Lanzhou and charges through the Liujiaxia and Heishanxia gorges into Ningxia. In Ningxia, it creates the fertile Zhongwei and Zhongning plains. After that it passes through Qingtongxia Gorge and reaches a wide expanse of plain east of the Helan Mountains. It fans out on the plain and forms the richest area of land in the Hetao area — Yinchuan. But Yinchuan only occupies a small portion of the middle of Yinchuan Plain.

Naturally Endowed

The affluent Yinchuan Plain in northwest China deserves its nickname as 'Jiangnan on the Frontier', thanks to the presence of the Yellow River and the Helan Mountains. If the river did not run between the Tengger Desert and the Helan Mountains, the thousands of hectares of rice paddy fields would not exist. And there would be no 'tribute rice' for the emperor, or the large variety and quantity of fruits and the primitive forest in the depths of the mountains. If the towering Helan Mountains did not create such a huge climatic barrier, the cold snaps and dry winds of the Alxa Wasteland of Inner Mongolia, as well as the gulping drifting sand dunes, would charge in like the armed horsemen of the northern nomadic tribes. No plant life would have been possible.

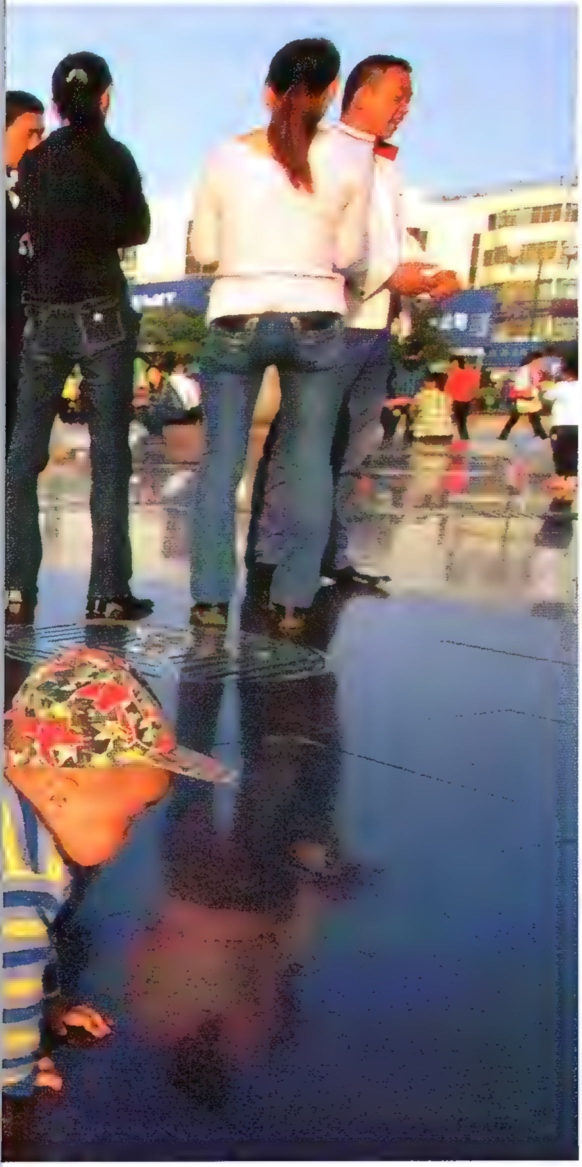
A stroll through the new and old towns of Yinchuan lets you fully experience this affluent city, in which the townspeople seem content, enjoying their leisure time and the diversity of life here. In town, each street overflows with commercial activity. From dawn

1. Tasty melons grown on the Yinchuan Plain.

2. Mini Tian'anmen Square in old Yinchuan is a good meeting place.

3. To help the vegetation of the Yinchuan Plain recover, grazing is banned. People herd their sheep to folds in remote villages.

4. Headscarves are a daily necessity for Yinchuan women.



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to dusk the streets buzz to rival Hong Kong's Tsim Sha Tsui or Causeway Bay. Local products such as sheepskin, medlar fruit (a kind of apple), facai algae and Helanshan rock appeal to visiting customers. Others like the red melon seeds, saizhenzhu (pearl-like) tribute rice, Yellow River carp and sesame seed oil as much as the locals do. At the morning market in particular, fruits and vegetables of different colours are piled high on the stands at giveaway prices, particularly local vegetables. One yuan can buy three to four jin — compare that to veggie prices in Hong Kong! Yinchuan's young people love trendy clothes. Young women take every opportunity to reflect their personalities in their outfits. Yinchuan's weather is changeable, too; cool in the early morning and late afternoon without the sun, but hot at noon. Quite a few women in Yinchuan wear headscarves, knotted behind the heads and exposing just their eyes. Comparatively, Uygur women cover their faces completely with scarves. Uygur women do it for religious reasons, while Yinchuan women do it to protect their skin. The air in Ningxia is much drier than that of South China. A headscarf can be used to block the sun's damaging rays and keep the face cool. An almost fully covered face adds to the romantic imagination of the beholder. Here, beauty is more often in the eyes of the beholder.

Miniature Tian'anmen Gate

I had long heard of the miniature Tian'anmen Gate in the old town of Yinchuan. When I saw it, I admired the carefree courage of the Yinchuan people. According to an ancient Chinese law, it was illegal to build structures that imitated royal facilities and residences. The gate resembles the real one in Beijing except it is much smaller and it only takes 10 minutes to get to the miniature Tian'anmen Gate from the Drum Tower! Best of all, the viewing platforms extending out on either side of the replica afford a feeling of status that must be equal to that of standing on the real thing, even at a tenth of the size. The builder of the miniature Tian'anmen Gate might not have intended that, but it shows his respect for Beijing.

At dawn, people gather here to perform their morning exercises, practise taichi or take their bird or dog for a stroll. At dusk, husband and wife, lovers, grandparents and grandchildren all pair up to enjoy some peace, a good walk, or family fun at the end of the day on the square.

Twenty percent of Yichuan's population is Muslim, but if not for the white caps they wear, it would be hard to tell a Muslim from a Han. People live together in peace. The Hui Muslims and today's Han are both descendants of migrant peoples. At the beginning of the Yuan Dynasty (1206—1368) shortly after the Mongols conquered China, the Mongol ruler

1. Morning exercises at Yuhuangge, or Jade Emperor Pavilion.

2. Yinchuan's youth love shopping and trendy clothes.

3. It must be a healthy place if hospital patients can take their drips out for a walk!

4. Elderly Muslims wait outside the Najiahu Mosque.

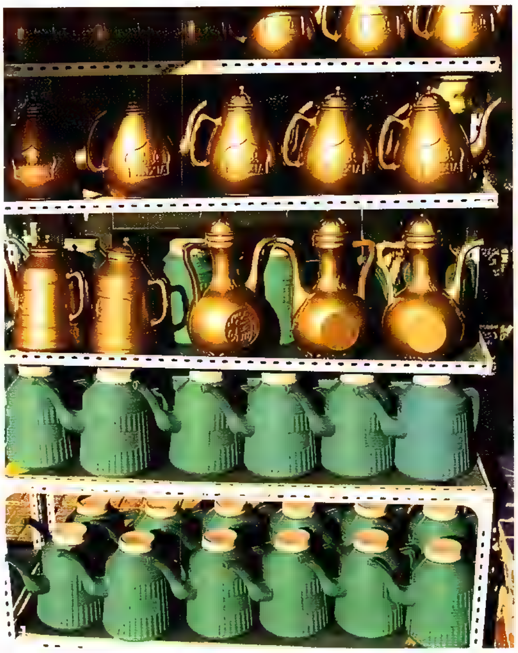
2

3

stationed the valiant Arab legions in the Hetao region, east of Helanshan, to open up the wasteland and grow grain there. The Penal Statutes of the Ming contains the following: 'The Mongols and the Semuren (literally 'colour-eyed people', which refers to the Arabs in the Mongol troops, who were later called 'Huihui'), since they have settled down in China, shall not marry within their own respective ethic groups.' Apparently, the Ming emperor wanted to try the same trick the Mongols had used to wipe out the Tangut. The statute ruled that Mongols and Huihui could marry only people of other ethnic groups. In that way, the Ming ruler intended to destroy them. History, however, had other plans. As the Huihui troops, almost all of them men, were allowed to marry Han women, they had offspring. Later their population developed to such a degree that 'it was all Huihui villages along the thousand li from Ningxia to Pingliang'.

Why did the policy have different effects on the Tangut and the Huihui? The reasons are many, but one is clear: Islam has an unusual resiliency and cohesive power.

Huihui Customs and Culture



Mosques can be seen throughout the old town. Densely packed Muslim restaurants line the streets and the ubiquitous tangping, or Muslim ablution water pots for Minor Ablutions (Wudhu), can also be found everywhere. Non-Muslim outsiders unfamiliar with tangping may find them interesting, especially when they learn their function, and marvel at the wisdom of the Muslims.

Once when I was in a mutton chop suey restaurant, I needed to eat some bread with my hands, so I asked the owner where I could wash up. He pointed outside. I looked and looked but could find no tap or wash basin. The owner saw me through the window and realized my confusion. He pointed at the long-necked pot on the windowsill. It was a

1. The tangping, or Muslim ablution water pot.

2. A young Huihui man wears a T-shirt depicting Canto-pop star Andy Lau.

3. Mosque for female Muslims.

tangping, a container of water Muslims use to wash their ears, hands and face. According to the Islamic cannons, Muslims must conduct Minor and Major Ablutions. For Major Ablutions, a large diaoguan, or hung jar, will serve the purpose for a full body wash, rinsing the mouth and clearing the nostrils. For Minor Ablutions, the tangping is used to drip water to wash the face and hands, much as we use the tap.

Muslims fuse sacred religious rituals with daily life and practise them without variation, year after year.

In a broader sense, however, human wisdom and cultural resiliency are no match for the power of mountains and rivers. Nature is the very source and essence of all life. The joint forces of the Helan Mountains and the Yellow River created the riches of Yinchuan. In such a fortunate geographical niche and after a millennium-long cultural evolution and all the changes wrought by history, the Yinchuan people of today are blessed with affluence and leisure.

The Helan Mountains deserve the respect and admiration of us all.

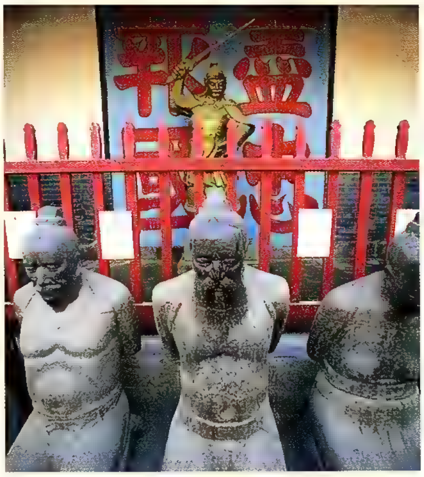
Translated by Zhang Boli

The Legend of National Hero Yue Fei

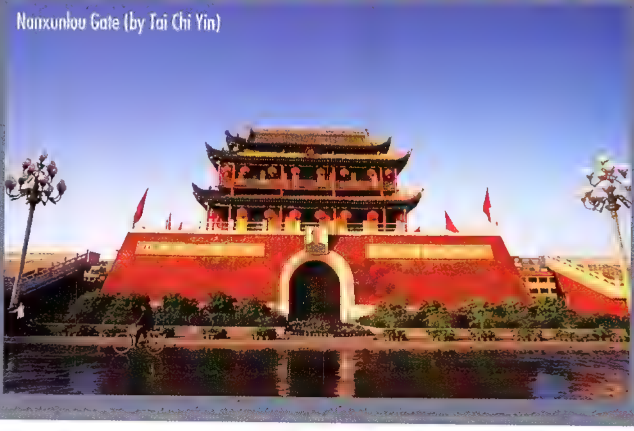
General Yue Fei, the national hero of the Southern Song Dynasty, was born in a poor and humble family. But he worked very hard and was a fierce general. In his day, minority nationalities on the northern border, such as the Jins, invaded Central China repeatedly. In his famous poem *Man Jiang Hong* (Entirely Red River), he said in one line: Lead the horse-cart and head to all passes at Mt Helan, so as to kill all invades.

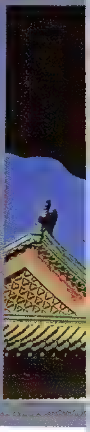
Although Yue Fei and other war hawks had won brilliant victories and recovered the most part of the territory, it was the capitulationists like Qin Hui who wielded real power at court. They even resorted to false accusations to eliminate the war party and finally had Yue Fei sent to prison and executed.

After the emperor Xiaozong succeeded to the throne, Yue Fei was cleared of the groundless charges and a temple was built in his memory at the foot of Qixia Ling by West Lake in Hangzhou. Before Yue Fei's tomb are four cast-iron kneeling figures, with chests bare and hands bound behind their backs. They are responsible for the murder of Yue Fei. The two on the left are Qin Hui and his wife who master-minded the whole thing and the two on the right are their lackeys, Zhang Jun and Mo Qixie. As people cherished the love of Yue Fei and hated Qin Hui and his followers, they had these four casts in iron, to kneel forever before the tomb.



Scenic Spots of Yinchuan


Nanxunlou Gate (by Tai Chi Yin)



Yinchuan

Drum Tower, Jade Emperor Pavilion Drum Tower built in the Qing Dynasty (1616-1911), and Jade Emperor Pavilion, built in the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644), are both located in the centre of the old town. They are only 100 metres apart. They are regarded as two most famous ancient architectural constructions in Yinchuan. Between Drum Tower and Jade Emperor Pavilion is the well-known Muslim food street in Yinchuan and a small park. A tranquil retreat in a boisterous section of the town, the park comprises kiosk, pavilion, tower and other ancient styled constructions. In the park local people often perform opera with musical instruments, play chess, drink tea, practise kungfu, do exercises and stroll the bird. On one side of Drum Tower is a modern commercial pedestrian street.

Transportation: Take bus No. 1, 11 or 29 to Drum Tower and Jade Emperor Pavilion.

Nanxunlou Gate Nanxunlou Gate is said to be the south gate of Yinchuan. It is now the only remaining part. Its foundation can be dated back to the Tanguts who migrated to the place. In the great earthquake in Ningxia in 1738, the gate tumbled down. In 1740 it was rebuilt, but it was later ruined by fire. In 1917 it was rebuilt again. In the 1950s, to provide a commanding site for honourable guests to inspect the procession during the National Day celebration, a viewing platform was added to both sides of the gate. Surprisingly the whole construction resembled Tian'anmen Gate, only smaller in size. In front of Nanxunlou Gate is a wide square, a rendezvous for the locals.

Transportation: Take bus No. 1, 2, 9, 14, 17, 19 or 31 to reach Nanxunlou Gate.

Pagoda of Chengtian Temple Yinchuan people call it Xita colloquially, or West Pagoda. Located inside Chengtian Temple in Xinhua Street West, the pagoda was initially built with the temple in the Western Xia Dynasty, in about 1,050. In 1738 it was ruined the great earthquake too. In 1820 in the Qing Dynasty, it was rebuilt. The shape and brickwork pattern of the pagoda are unsophisticated but delicately detail oriented. The pagoda is of 11 storeys, with eight tilted eaves. It has a wooden staircase leading to the top. It houses Ningxia History Museum, with Ningxia History Museum, Western Xia Relics Museum, Helanshan Cliff Painting Gallery, and Ningxia Hui Cultural Relics and Customary Objects Museum.

Transportation: Take bus No. 2, 5, 6, 15 or 17 to reach the pagoda.

Nanguan Mosque Located in the south end of Yuhuangge Road, Nanguan Mosque is not far from Nanxunlou Square. Built in the end of the Ming Dynasty, it boasts of about 400 years of history. In 1981 it was rebuilt on the original site. Before entering the main gate, one may feel like entering an Arabic garden. The environment is peaceful and detached, with lots of grasses, flowers and trees. In the courtyard of the mosque is a water pond. The Prayer (Salah) Hall in the middle comprises a Middle East styled dome, with ornately embedded Islamic patterns on the walls. The hall can accommodate 1,300 believers simultaneously for Salah. Two minarets stand tall and symmetrical on both sides of the Prayer Hall. The mosque allows tourists and provides guide service. During the prayer time the mosque allows tourists of other ethnic groups to watch the ritual inside.

Transportation: Take bus No. 22, 28 or 29.

Haibao Pagoda Haibao Pagoda is located in Haibao Park in the northern suburb of the town, hence North Pagoda colloquially. Its exact construction time is unclear. It is said that the Hun king of Daxia Kingdom had renovated Haibao Pagoda at the beginning of Daxia, in the fifth century. Later it was destroyed by earthquake. The body of the pagoda has 12 faces, while its doors and windows at the same level are interleaved with a slight height difference to reveal an exquisite multi-sided cube with crisscrossing lines in regular patterns. A staircase inside leads people to the top.

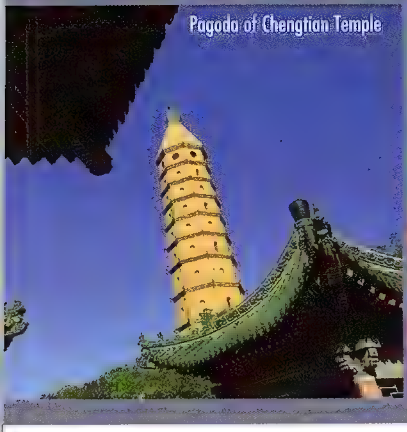
Transportation: Take bus No. 29.

Outskirts of Yinchuan

Suyukou Pass Located in Helan Mountains, 40 km to the northwest of Yinchuan, the scenic zone features a expanse of towering mountains with dense forests. It is equipped with hotels, resorts, cable car and other facilities. It is a good place for sightseeing, vacation and mountaineering. One needs to rent a vehicle in Yinchuan to get there.

Helankou Pass Located in the north of Suyukou, about 15 km away, Helankou is a valley with the densest distribution of cliff paintings. The cliffs in the valley are craggy, and creeks are gurgling. Cliff

Sand Lake


Pagoda of Chengtian Temple

Nanguan Mosque

Twin pagodas at Baisi Temple

Mausoleum of Western Xia Kingdom

An unearthed brick statue

paintings of different eras and in different styles are scattered on the slopes. There are farmhouses outside the Helankou Valley to cater to tourists. One needs to rent a vehicle in Yinchuan to go to Helankou.

Baisikou Pass It is located between Suyukou and Helankou. The place has been elaborated in the article. No more details will be related here. One needs to rent a vehicle to go there.

Gunzhongkou Pass Locally called Xiaokouzi, or 'small valley', the valley is known for both the geographical wonders and its many a Taoist, Buddhist and Islamic temples. In addition, one can visit the cottage of Ma Hongkui, President of the Ningxia Provincial Government in the Republic Period. There are a few resorts in the place. One can stay there for a few days of escape in the tranquillity of the valley. The famous Helanshan rock is produced in Bijiashan Mountain inside Gunzhongkou. One needs to rent a vehicle to get there.

Zhenbeipu Movie & Video City Located on the way to Suyukou and Helankou, it was originally a station troops outpost that guarded the Helanshan pass and Yinchuan. After it was discovered by writer Zhang Xianliang, a famous Chinese writer, who was on exile to the place, it was turned into a movie and video city to shoot desert, gobi, bandit and swordsman movies. A special minibus to the place is available at the Yinchuan South Gate (Mini Tian'anmen Gate).

Mausoleum of Western Xia Kingdom Located on the way to Sanguankou, about 30 km away from Yinchuan, it is the only tourist site among all nine mausoleums of Western Xia kings. It is said to be the mausoleum of King Li Yuanhao. There is a museum in the mausoleum area, with many Western Xia relics. One needs to rent a vehicle to get there.

Sand Lake Formed with the flood water of Mt Helan and the water from Yellow River, it is slightly larger than West Lake in Hangzhou. The most interesting point of Sand Lake is that it is embedded among desert and farming fields, escorted with many smaller puddles. Exuberant reeds grow in the lake, forming a complicated marsh forest. Water birds are everywhere. On a side of the tourist pier stands a watchtower. On top of the tower one can command a panoramic view of the entire beautiful Sand Lake and the outlying Helan Mountains. The sandbank of dozens of metres high is on the southern bank of the lake. Tourists can enjoy sand skiing, riding camel or horse and swimming. Sand Lake fish tastes good. Many restaurants outside the main gate are specialized in Sand Lake fish. The lake is 50 km away from Yinchuan. Tourist coaches to Sand Lake are available in the bus station in the north of the city.

Shabotou Located in Zhongwei County, about 200 km to the south of Yinchuan, it is at the intersection between the southern edge of Tengger Desert and the Yellow River, 20 km to the west of the seat of the County. Recreation activities there include sand skiing, exciting sheepskin rafting on the Yellow River, and camel race into the depth of Tengger Desert for over 20 km. One can take a long-distance coach or train to Zhongwei County, and then take a bus in Zhongwei Long-distance Station to Shabotou Park.

Zhongwei Gaomiao Temple Located in the centre of the town, it is a temple combining Buddhism, Taoism and Confucianism. Like Drum Tower and Jade Emperor Pavilion in Yinchuan, the shape of the temples is different from that of the ancient constructions in Central China. The structure of the temples of Gaomiao is highly compact and delicate. Each inch of space is properly utilized. The brick, stone and wood sculptures in the entire architecture establishment are precise and exquisite.

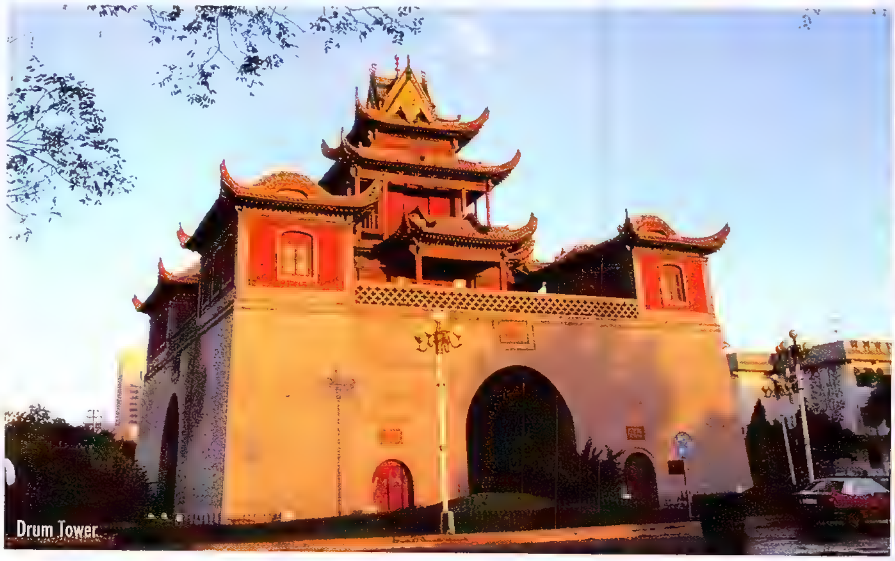
108 Pagodas of Qingtongxia Gorge When visiting the Qingtongxia Gorge reservoir of the Yellow River, one should not miss the 108 brick pagodas densely arranged in a pyramid matrix on the west slope near the dam. The pagoda matrix is arranged in a shape of isoceles triangle. The amazing arrangement of the pagodas is unique among its kind in China. Some experts presume that they were built in the Yuan Dynasty. One needs to rent a vehicle to visit the 108 pagodas in Qingtongxia City.

Haibao Pagoda

Geography and Climate

Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region is adjacent to Shaanxi Province, connects to Inner Mongolia in the north and the west, and borders with Gansu Province in the south. Of an area of about 50,000 km, or one third of that of Guangdong Province, it is the smallest province in China.

Ningxia owns a temperate continental climate that features distinctive seasons. In summer it will not be sizzling hot, while in winter it is relatively cold. The annual rainfall is 300mm to 677mm. The annual sunshine hours reach 3,000 hours, and the frost-free period is about 150 days. Ningxia is one of the regions with longest sunshine and most sufficient sun radiation in China. With the irrigation of the Yellow River water, the Ningxia Plain has no drought though the air is dry. The best time to travel there will be between April and October.



Drum Tower

Transportation

- By air

Hong Kong does not have direct flight to Ningxia now. One needs to fly from Shenzhen. There is one flight in Shenzhen from Monday to Sunday.

- By train

There are direct express trains from Beijing, Shanghai, Xi'an and Lanzhou to Yinchuan.

- Urban transportation

Taxi: As the numbers of tourists to the peripheral sites of Yinchuan vary, usually no buses or tourist minibuses are available. You need to bargain with the taxi driver according to the distance when you plan to take a taxi to those places. It is suggested to ask locals about the market prices of taxi to different sites so that you have a starting price. If the distance is longer than 20 km, taxi charging by metering is relatively expensive. It is better to have a fixed price for the one-way trip or round trip.

Long-distance bus: The buses available in South Gate Long-distance Bus Station chiefly head for the south of the autonomous region. There are buses bound for Qingtongxia Gorge, Wuzhong, Zhongwei, Zhongning, Guyuan, Lingwu and other places. Over ten

108 pagodas of Qingtongxia Gorge

Market in Yinchuan
(by Tai Chi Yin)

Tanyang sheepskin (by [illegible]

runs to those places are available in a day. Tel: (951) 603 2157

The buses available in North Gate Tourist Coach Station head for places in the north of the autonomous region, including Sand Lake, Shizhuishan, Dawukou, Pingluo and Rujigou. Over ten runs to those places are available in a day.

Accommodation

The accommodation facilities in Yinchuan and the peripheral tourist sites are good and less expensive. For example, the standard room in Drum Tower Hotel is about 150 yuan. In low season the rate will be discounted. Transportation from the hotel to commercial districts is convenient. They are close to the shopping streets and food streets.

Other hotels:

- **Ningxia Hotel** No. 3, Gongyuan Street (take bus No. 1 and alight at the gate of the park)
- **Minhang Building** At the southeastern block of the intersection of Shengli Road North and Nanhuan Road East.
  Tel: (951) 691 3688
- **Yinchuan Hotel** Yuhuange (Jade Emperor Pavilion) Road South.
  Rate: 180 yuan for a standard room.
  Tel: (951) 602 2531
- **Xinhua Hotel** At the northwestern block of the intersection of Xinhua Road East and Xinhua Road South. Rate: 45 yuan for a standard room and 25 yuan for three-bed room. The price is attractive, and the hygiene condition is fair.
  Tel: (951) 603 1353

Food

On a trip to Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region, Muslim food is certainly the top choice. Famous Hui local snack restaurants in Yinchuan are Huixiang Shifu Restaurant, Minzhu Fengqingyuan Restaurant, Wanbaolou Restaurant, Baiwei Jiaoziguan Restaurant and Laomao Boiled Lamb Restaurant. High-class Muslim food restaurants include Xianhelou Restaurant, Yingbinlou Restaurant, Quanjude Muslim Restaurant and Delonglou Restaurant.

Local Produce

The local produce of Ningxia is famous in China. The most famous items are: medlar, liquorice, Helan Sapphire, dried sheepskin and facai algae, or the coal of Taixi. The coal in Taixi, however good, cannot be a gift. Other famous items include Ningxia rice, purple mushroom of Helan Mountains, red melon seed, seabuckthorn fruit and willowware of Qingtongxia Gorge. If you want to keep a piece of Helan Sapphire, you can go to Ningxia Weird Stone Gallery, West Pagoda Cultural Market and Ningxia Metal and Stone Craftwork Company. For others produce, you can simply get them in the Drum Tower pedestrian street.

Tips

The air of Ningxia is drier than that of Shaanxi and Shanxi provinces. Lip crack is a proof. Keeping the skin moist is the top priority. Drinking more water and eating fruits can solve the problem essentially, but you still need to use lip cream at all times. Another option is that you may learn the common practice of local women by wearing a head scarf. The feeling of the face will change immediately.

Farmhouse restaurant in Helankou

Sand Lake resort

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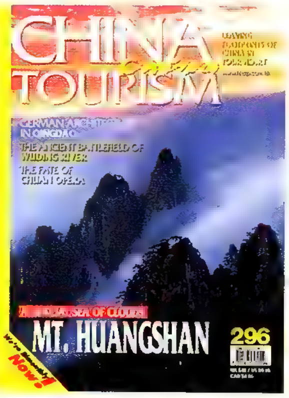

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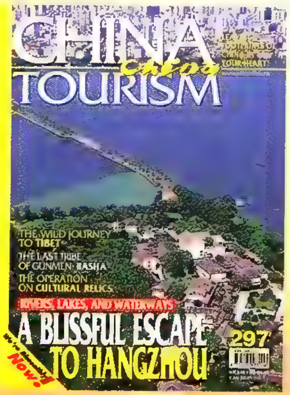

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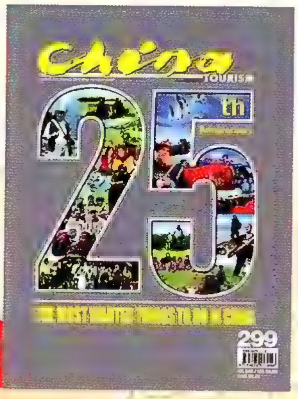

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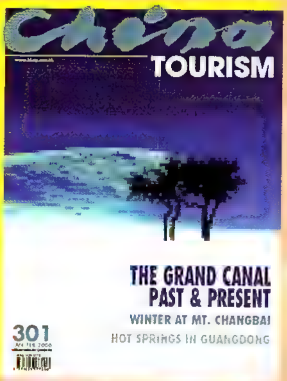

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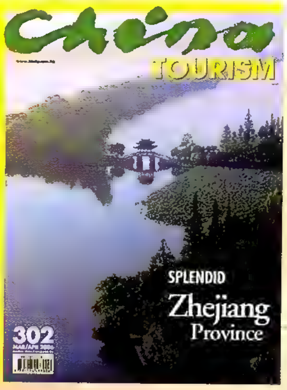

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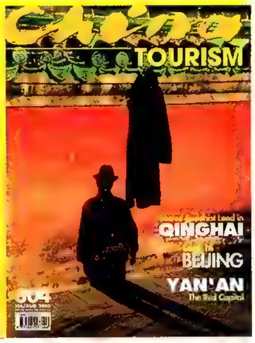

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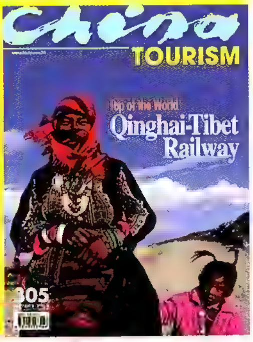

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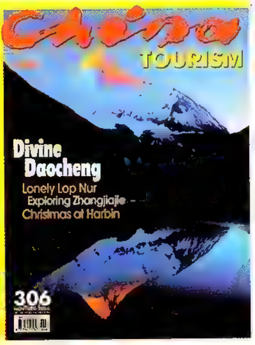

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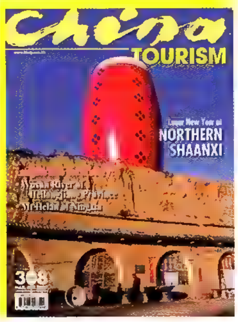

Our readers' ideas and opinions are important to us. Please take a few minutes to complete this questionnaire. Your responses will help us improve *China Tourism* magazine. Thank you!

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7. What information or topics you would like *China Tourism* to cover in the future?

____

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FEATURE STORY:

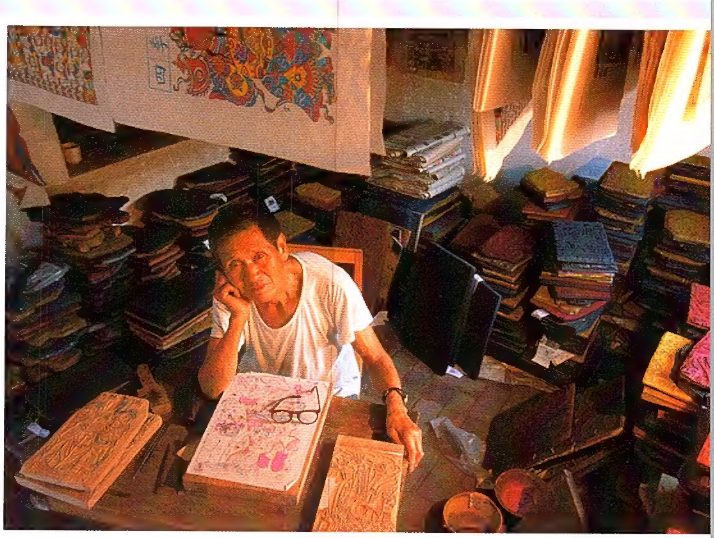
A Retreat to Jiangxi Province

To welcome the early spring, we will lead you to a journey in southern China's Jiangxi Province. The province offers pristine beauty of its misty Lushan Mountain and fresh water lakes, the cultural town of Wuyuan and its unique night performance, as well as the town of Yaoli — which enjoys a longer history in porcelain making than the world renowned Jingdezhen. A trip to Jiangxi will be best for city drifters who are looking for tranquillity in mainland.

Discoveries

The Fate of Street Monkey Shows

From their hometown in Xinye County to the southwest of Henan Province, the people dedicated to earn a living with street monkey shows are facing their fading career. Having followed a family doing this kind of show for three years, the reporter penetrates their life as street monkey show players — how to risk their lives to every strange place, how to strive for an unstable income, and how is their relationship with their 'babies', the monkeys.



Culture

Yangjiabu New Year Paintings

Yangjiabu is one of the places of production of the prints of New Year. These prints out of wooden manufactured in Yangjiabu are as old as three centuries. The report reveals some stories of the locals on how to maintain and develop their tradition.

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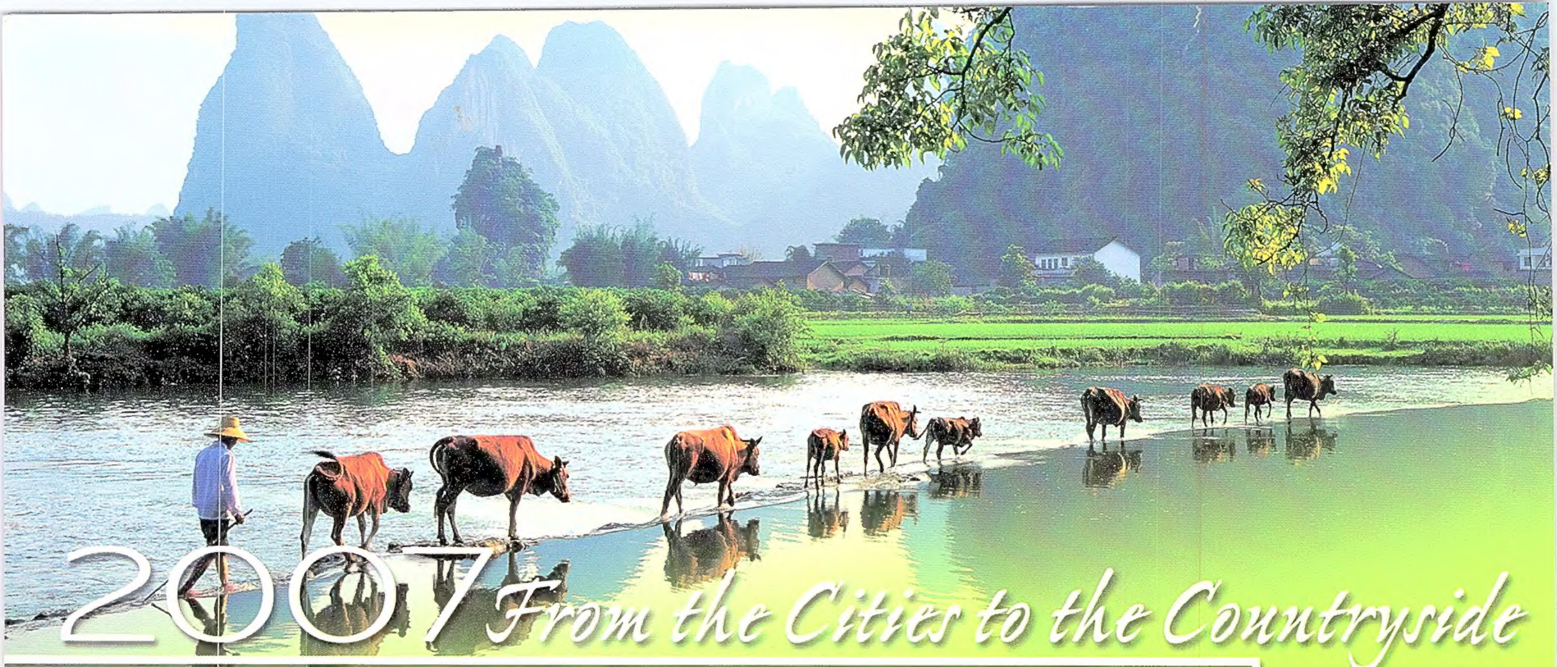

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